Plant Myths and Traditions in India



Shakti M. Gupta

Trees and plants play an important part in the myths and customs of India. Many are considered holy, often for reasons that are lost in the mists of antiquity—they are associated and identified with gods, planets, months, etc.—certain plants are used as protection against witchcraft and the evil eye—some plants bring luck and are offered in the temples—and others play an important part in other religious rites.

These traditions and myths form an important aspect of the Indian's mental background and Dr. Gupta, has performed a most useful service in bringing together all those are known on these subjects from the older Indian literature to modern research. The author discusses the forty-five most important trees and plants and describes the myths and customs connected with each. Specimens of Indian sculpture illustrating the various myths are reproduced on numerous plates.

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Dr. Shakti M. Gupta is an established writer on Hindu mythology. She has published a large number of books, *Vishnu and His Incarnations; Legends around Shiva; Surya, the Sun God; Karttikeya, the Son of Shiva; From Daityas to Devatas in Hindu Mythology;* and a comprehensive volume on *Festivals, Fairs and Fasts of India.* Her most recent book *Plants in Indian Temple Arts* is a survey of plants sculptured on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina temples.

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Revised and enlarged edition

Shakti M. Gupta

with a Foreword by

Late Dr. C. Sivaramamurti

with 28 illustrations



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To the memory of
Dr. C. Sivaramamurti
for his inspiration and encouragement

Contents

Foreword

In India trees and plants have been adored not only with devotion but have been affectionately fondled and almost treated as members of a family. Kalidasa mentions kindly spirits like *vanadevatas,* who had been companions of Sakuntala in the forest, almost shedding tears when she left her sylvan home for her residence in the palace of her husband, the king, and hastened to give her presents of silken garments and jewels worthy of a princess. When Sita was abandoned by Lakshmana in the forest at the command of Rama, Sita's sorrow stirred the trees and plants, and along with animals and birds, they too expressed their grief by shedding flowers like large drops of tears. Parvati makes no difference between her fond son Kumara and a Devadaru sapling almost chosen as her pet offspring, and she lovingly reared it by watering it with pitchers of water as with her own breast milk. When Aja laments for Indumati, the prince cannot refrain from mentioning with a pang the yet unfulfilled marriage of the two trees that the queen had brought up so lovingly in the hope of getting them married. This idea of getting trees paired in marriage bespeaks the almost human way in which they were treated. The creeper entwining the tree, spoken of by poets as the beloved clinging to her lord, is a poetic expression of this sympathy for plants, treated almost in human form. In the *Vishnusahasranama,* Vishnu is mentioned as the very embodiment of imposing trees like Udumabara, Aswattha, Asoka and Nyagrodha. Siva is himself conceived as a *yupa* post fashioned in Khadira or Sami wood. Sami has fire inside it. Rudra is also the embodiment of fire. Poets love to use the word Sthanu for Siva and Aparna (lit. leafless) for Parvati to suggest that even the dry tree trunk (*sthanu*) bears shoots in association with Aparna (*saparna*). *Oshadhis* or medicinal plants respond to the light of the moon as effectively as the humans in their joy for moonlight. In the Vedic hymns the *oshadhis* have been conceived as sentient and in the Puranas the *vanadevatas* are described as lovable sylvan deities. The simple faith of the Cheta in the *Mrichchhakatika* assumes that the (watchful) eye of the *vanadevata* is as effective as that of the sun and moon that are witnesses of the good and bad deeds of people on earth. This is a primitive belief that accounts for

a true and honest life in the simple and unsophisticated folk of nearly 2000 years ago.

Dr. (Mrs.) Shakti M. Gupta has to be thanked for writing a delightful book on plant myths and traditions in India, describing individual plants with their scientific nomenclature and the myths and stories associated with each one of them as well as usage and traditions peculiar to them. This is a book of immense interest and I am sure it will be welcomed by all those who desire to know the Indian outlook on life in general and on the vegetable kingdom in particular, as an exceedingly important group among sentient objects that won the hearts of their human neighbours. The *Dohada*, the *Vriksharopa*, the *Pratishta* of the Pipal tree, the worship of the *Chaityàvriksha* and other similar beliefs make it essential that the psychological approach towards plants in India should be studied in books like this. I am glad that Dr. Gupta has prepared a very interesting study in the true Indian spirit of affection towards plant life.

C. SIVARAMAMURTI

Director,
National Museum
New Delhi
20 May 1968

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List of Illustrations

Months of the Vikram Samvat and the Corresponding Months of the Solar Calendar

Kartika	October–November
Agrahayana	November–December
Pausha	December–January
Margasirsha	January–February
Phalguna	February–March
Chaitra	March–April
Vaisakha	April–May
Jyeshtha	May–June
Ashadha	June–July
Sravana	July–August
Bhadrapada, Bhadra	August–September
Asvina	September–October

Introduction

Man has been fascinated by nature since he evolved from his primitive ancestors, the apes. No doubt to start with, he hunted for food mainly by killing the wild animals, but if there was anything on which he could depend with any confidence towards its availability, it was the plant. Not only the fact that a large number of plants provided him with food but also the fact that they provided him with curative medicine and shelter, were perhaps the reasons why he worshipped them more than the animals which also gave him food.

The reason for a large number of plants not having any commercial use and still associated with myths and traditions are difficult to understand. The only explanation for their association with religious beliefs can be that these plants, perhaps because of their resemblance to the emblem of a particular deity or the name of a sage associated with them, made the plants sacred. For this reason alone a large number of plants are considered sacred in India, and are called the *Bodhi* trees as certain sages received enlightenment under them. For instance *Aswattha*[1] is the *Bodhi* tree of Sakya Muni or Buddha; *Nyagrodha* of Kasyapa; *Udumbara* of Kanak Muni; *Sirisa* of Krakuchhanda; *Asoka* of Vipaswi; *Pundarika* of Sikhi.

The availability of a plant can be another reason for its traditional use. Yet there again reasons defy explanation. Rice for instance is a fertility symbol. Its use at religious and marriage ceremonies can be understood in areas where rice is available in plenty. But what defies understanding is the fact that rice is used for the same reason and purpose even in areas where it is not cultivated. The only explanation for such a cult can be that when the migration of the human race from one corner of the earth to another took place, men took their traditions with them even when those plants were not easily available and often had to be procured from great distance.

The conservation of plants by worshipping them was very likely an important factor in making them sacred.

[1]M.S. Randhawa, *Cult of Trees and Tree Worship in Buddhist-Hindu Sculpture*, p. 13.

There are a large number of plants which are used by people all over India to get rid of the curse of witchcraft or to remove the effect of the evil eye but the reasons for faith and belief in them is lost in antiquity. For instance a plant called *Dodheri* by the Santhals of India is highly valued as its root is given in sickness attributed to witchcraft or the evil eye. Similarly, the nomadic tribes of Rajasthan tie, the leaves of *Bilatisij* to the neck of small children as an amulet to ward off the evil eye.

Among the Oriyan tribe Saoras, an amulet made of bits of the bark of *Pindara* is used as protection against Danunkisum, and a necklace made out of its bark, to protect the nursing mother. Similarly the plant *Tridhara* is supposed to possess power of warding off lightning strokes. *Amalaka* is a tree sacred to the Hindus and credited with magical properties by the tribesmen. Seeds of *Harmala* are burnt to drive away evil spirits or to avert the evil eye. The smoke emanating from the burning seeds cleanses the atmosphere of mosquitoes and germs. *Prisniparni* is used as a protection against sorcerers indulging in bringing about abortion.[1] These like *Bhela, Teṇdu* and *Nirgundi* are believed to have magical potency and the branches of these trees are used by the Oroan tribes of India to avert the evil eye, repel evil spirits and other evil influences from standing crops. *Aparmarga* is used in witchcraft against Kshatriyas and for medical purposes. In the *Atharvaveda* it is described as revertive because it wards off a spell by causing it to recoil on its user.

Though generally speaking the identity of plants with the deities belonged to the tradition of Aryan migration, such as the association of the *Soma* plant with the moon, a large number of plants that are associated with the deities belong to the traditional flora of India such as the association of *Tulasi* and *Amalaka* with Vishnu; *Bilva* with Siva and Sri-Lakshmi with the lotus. In such cases the association of the plant with the deities would be pre-Aryan.[2]

The utility of trees in a hot country was recognised by people from very early times. The merit of planting trees is given in many ancient texts. In *Matsya Purana*,[3] a legend mentions that Parvati planted a sapling of *Asoka* and the gods asked her the merit of planting trees. To this Parvati replied: "A *Vapi* is equal in fruit to 10 wells, a pond to 10 *Vapis*, a son to 10 ponds and a tree is equal in merit to 10 sons."[4] The merit for the performance of rite of consecration of trees and orchards is also mentioned in *Agni Purana*.

To the Hindus all plants having the trifoliate arrangement of their

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India*, p. 74; A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index*, vol. II, p. 18.

[2]Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, p. 158.

[3]V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purana: A Study*, p. 243.

[4]*Agni Purana*, pp. 250-51.

leaves like *Varuna*, are associated with the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and its leaves are offered to all the three gods. Leaves of *Bilva* and *Mandara* also have trifoliate leaf arrangement but are offered to Siva only, the leaves being associated with the trident.

Apart from the above associations, a large number of other plants are also considered auspicious and their flowers are offered at temples or their wood used for the sacred fire ceremony *homa*. Below are given the names of a few such plants. The flowers of *Aparajit* are used in religious ceremonies. Flowers for offering to Kali and Hanuman are *Japa*. Incidentally this flower is also a favourite one for incantations in evil designs. The wood of *Arka* is used in *homa* and its flowers are offered to Siva and Hanuman. Siva is also offered flowers of *Dhatura*. Flowers of *Sehund* or *Sij* are sacred for Manasa, the snake goddess and offered at her temples by the tribal and hill people where snake worship is prevalent, particularly in Bengal and South India. The leaves of the *Neem* tree are used in the feast connected with the last rites of death by certain tribes of Orissa. The inflorescence of *Khadira* is used in ceremonies on auspicious occasions like marriages in South India and Gujarat. *Kusa ghas* is held sacred by the Hindus all over India. The odorous roots of *Dhup* is used as incense and its flowers are offered at shrines and temples. The sweet scented flowers of Daphne bholua as well as of *Guma* are offered at temples. The scented wood of *Chandana* or sandalwood is extensively used in religious ceremonies. The paste made from the wood has a cooling effect and it is believed to remove sins, miseries and sorrows and also to augument riches.

In ancient India, an elaborate ritual was laid for each sacred ceremony and plants formed an important niche in the ceremony. At the coronation of Yudhishthira after the battle of Kurukshetra;[1] "there were golden jars full to the brim with water, also jars made of silver, copper and earth, flowers, fried paddy, *Kusa ghas*, cow's milk, sacrificial fuel consisting of the woods of *Sami, Pipala, Palasa*, honey, clarified butter and sacrificial ladles made of *Udumbara* and conches adorned with gold." *Garuda Purana* mentions the ritual use of plants.[2] Twigs of sacrificial plants such as *Arka, Palasa, Khadira, Aparmarga, Pipala, Udumbara, Sami*, blades of *Durba* and *Kusa ghas* soaked with curd, honey, clarified butter should be repeatedly cast into the sacrificial fire, in the *homa* ceremonies which are celebrated for the propitiation of the planets such as the Sun.

Plants are repeatedly mentioned in connection with customs, traditions and beliefs. In fact no ceremony is complete without some sacred plant being used. For instance in the *Mahabharata*, Sakra says: "Rubbed

[1]*Mahabharata*, vol. VII, Drona Parva, p. 91.

[2]M.N. Dutt, *Garuda Purana*, p. 293.

with the astringent powder of the hanging roots of the Banyan tree and anointed with the oil of *Priyangu* one should eat the *Shashlika* paddy mixed with milk. By so doing one gets cleansed of all sins."[1]

The merit of offering flowers, incense and lamps to deities was given by Sukra of Bhrigu's race when he was the priest of the *daityas,* to the *daitya* king Vali, son of Virochana: "Flowers gladden the mind and confer prosperity. The man who in a state of purity offers flowers to the deities, finds that the deities become gratified with him and bestow prosperity upon him."[2]

The flowers offered in various months of the year to various deities are mentioned in *Garuda Purana.* "The vow of *Ananga-trayodasi* falls on the thirteenth day of the moon's increase in the month of *Margasirsha.* Yogesvara should be worshipped on this day with offerings of *Dhatura,* twigs of *Mallika, Bilva* (*Vilva*) leaves, twigs of *Kadamba,* sandal paste; God Nateshvara with *Kunda* flowers and *Plaksha* twigs. In the month of *Phalguna* God Viresvara is to be worshipped with *Muruvaka* flowers, pot herbs, *Chuta* tree flowers and twigs of *Vata;* in *Vaisakha* God Sambhu to be offered flowers of *Asoka,* twigs of *Udumbara* and nutmeg. In the month of *Jyeshtha,* Pradyumna an incarnation of Kamadeva, the god of love, is to be worshipped with *Champaka* flowers and *Bilva* twigs. In *Ashadha* gods are worshipped with flowers of *Aparmarga* and *Agaru* twigs. In *Sravana* with *Karavira* flowers. In *Asvina* God Suradhipa, lord of celestials is worshipped with flowers of *Vakula,* twigs of *Madhavi; Champaka* flowers and twigs of *Khadira.* In *Kartika,* Rudra is worshipped with twigs of *Vadari.* At the end of the year *puja* is performed with milk, pot herbs and lotus flowers are offered to deities.[3] Puranas also mention that he who gives libations of first fruits in the vessels made of *Palasa, Nyagrodha, Kasmari, Madhuka, Phalgu, Bilva, Venu,* get the benefit of the *yajnas.*[4]

Flowers are classified as fierce, mild and powerful and the flowers acceptable to different deities are of diverse kinds. A detailed account is given in the *Mahabharata* regarding the types of flowers that ought to be offered to the deities. "Flowers that have an agreeable scent should be offered to the deities; flowers without thorns and white in colour are most acceptable. Garlands of aquatic flowers like the lotus should be offered to *gandharvas, nagas* and *yakshas.* Red flowers, painful to touch, growing on thorny plants, deep red or black in colour should be offered to evil spirits and unearthly beings. Flowers which gladden the mind and heart, of a beautiful form and agreeable to touch when pressed are

[1]*Mahabharata,* vol. X, Anusasana Parva, p. 265.
[2]Ibid., pp. 180-82.
[3]Dutt, *Garuda Purana,* p. 355.
[4]V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *Purana Index,* vol. II, p. 472.

worthy of being offered to human beings. Flowers growing on mountains and valleys, beautiful to look at and with an agreeable scent should be offered to deities. The deities become gratified with the scent of flowers; the *yakshas* and the *rakshasas* with their sight, the *nagas* with their touch and human beings with all three, viz., scent, sight and touch.[1]

All exudations except that of Boswellia serrata are agreeable to the deities. The best exudation that is made into *dhup* or incense is of Commiphora mukul and of Aquilaria agallocha. It is agreeable to the *yakshas, rakshasas* and the *nagas.* The *dhup* made of *Kunduru* is desired by the *daityas. Dhups* made from the resins of the *Sala* and *Deodara* are ordained for human beings. About offering of lamps: light is energy and flame has an upward motion. The gift of light which is energy, enhances the energy of man. Bhishma advised Yudhishthira: "It is recommended that a man of intelligence should smear his limbs with unguents made of *Priyangu, Bilva, Tagara,* and *Kesara,*"[2] Most of these plants are highly medicinal and pharmacology was well developed in ancient India.

Just as there are religious prejudices in favour of some plants, there are also prejudices against their use. Flowers growing in cemeteries or in places dedicated to the deities are not used in marriages or in rites for prosperity or for acts of dalliance. There is a taboo on wearing garlands of red flowers and instead, flowers of white colour are recommended. Red flowers however, can be worn in the hair. A variety of Acacia nilotica named *Rama Kanta* or *Rama Kati* is never used on auspicious occasions as it is symbolic of Rama's ward. Similarly, the Tamarind tree inspite of the legends connected with it, is never used for auspicious ceremonies as its fruit being sour, it is believed that the ceremony will turn 'sour' and thus become fruitless and lose its meaning.

Characters and situations are often compared poetically to flowers and plants in Hindu mythology. Karna, badly wounded in the battle of Mahabharata is described as such:[3] "Pierced with those arrows equipped with heads like the calf's tooth, Adiratha's son of broad chest looked resplendent like an *Asoka* tree, *Palasa* or *Salmali* decked with their load of flowers or a mountain overgrown with a forest of *Chandana* trees. Indeed with those numerous arrows sticking to his body, Karna, O Monarch, looked resplendent like the prince of mountains with its top and glens over grown with trees or decked with flowering *Karnikaras* or *Kimsuka* flowers.[4] *Kimsuka* flowers are compared to the new nail mark

[1]*Mahabharata,* vol. X, Anusasana Parva, pp. 180-81; E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* pp. 68-69.
[2]*Mahabharata,* vol. X, Anusasana Parva, pp. 205-6.
[3]Ibid., vol. VI, Karna Parva, p. 259.
[4]*Karnikara* flowers of golden colour are without smell. There is a belief that its flowers make one sad.

on the body of the beloved. The English translation of the *Kamasutra* by Sivaramamurti reads: "The cluster of buds on the *Kimsuka* tree brought on by charming spring appeared like nail mark decoration on the lover imposed by the passionate beloved lady whose love overcame shyness."[1]

Sometimes more than one plant has the same common name and it is difficult to find the right plant to which a particular myth is attributed. For instance, *Mandara, Parijata, Durva* and *Kusa ghas,* and *Soma lata* are the common names of more than one plant. Often the plants are mythical and difficult to identify and confusion increases when they are mixed with plants which exist in the present times. For instance, "*Kushtha* plant grows in the third heaven under the *Aswattha* tree along with *Soma.*"[2] May be some of the plants mentioned are extinct but the description given of the said plants is too meagre for them to be identified with fossil plants. In the *Bhagavata Purana* is a story of Priyavrata who married Visvakarma's daughter Barhishmati and had by her ten sons who are all named after Agni. Priyavrata reigned 400,000,000 years. The Sun-god Aditya moves round the Sumeru Mt. and sends his rays to the Loka-loka range, illumining half the regions while the other half remains dark. Priyavrata of high spiritual powers decided to illuminate the dark regions so that there was perpetual daylight. To effect this, he followed the Sun-god seven times in his chariot till Brahma appeared before him and said: "Desist, O Son, this is not thy assigned duty in the Universe."[3] But since Priyavrata had already gone round Sumeru Mt., the ruts caused by the wheels of his chariot formed the seven oceans which gave rise to the seven *dvipas*: Jambu, Plaksha, Salmali, Kusa, Krauncha, Saka and Pushkara. Each succeeding *dvipa* is twice as large as the preceding one. Most of them are named after a sacred tree that grows there.

According to the *Mahabharata,*[4] the eastern side of Meru has a large forest of *Bhadra salas* and a huge tree called *Kalamra,* the eternal mango tree. This *Kalamra* is always graced with fruits and flowers. It is a *yojana* in height and adored by *Siddhas* and *Charanas.* People who live on this mountain are good looking, of fair complexion and live upto 10,000 years. Drinking the juice of *Kalamra,* they continue to be youthful.

On the south of the Nila and north of the Nishadha, there is a huge *Jamvu* tree that is eternal and wish fulfilling. The *dvipa* is named Jamvudvipa after the tree *Jamvu.* The height of the tree is a thousand and hundred *yojanas.* Two thousand and five hundred cubit measure is the circumference of a fruit of the tree. When the fruit is ripe, it bursts and falls on the ground making a loud noise and a silvery juice pours out

[1]C. Sivaramamurti, *Sanskrit Literature and Art, Mirrors of Indian Culture,* pp. 36-37.
[2]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* p. 177.
[3]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* pp. 131-32.
[4]*Mahabharata,* vol. V, Bhishma Parva, p. 19.

of it. This juice becomes a river and passing circuitously round Meru, comes to the region of the northern Kurus. Drinking that juice, one gets peace of mind, never feel thirsty again and decrepitude never weakens one.

Sometimes cities are compared to flowers. According to the *Bhagavata Purana,*[1] lotus flower floats on the lake. Madhura (Mathura) rears up on the earth, protected by the *chakra,* the disc of Vishnu. Hence, it is called Gopalapuri. This city is surrounded by twelve forests. But only 11 forests are mentioned.

1. *Brihad vana*	from *Brihad* or large[2]
2. *Madhu vana*	from Madhuca indica
3. *Tala vana*	from *Tala,* a palm tree, Borassus flabellifer
4. *Bahula vana*	from *Bahula,* cardamom; Amomum subulatum or Elettaria cardamomum
5. *Kumuda vana*	from *Kumuda,* lotus, Nelumbo nucifera
6. *Khadira vana*	from *Khadira,* Acacia catechu
7 *Bhadra vana*	from *Bhadra,* Gmelina asiatica
8. *Bhandira vana*	from *Bhandra,* Clerodendrum infortunatum
9. *Sri vana*	from *Sri* or *Srivriksha,* Aegle marmelos
10. *Loha vana*	from *Loha,* a plant, Aloe agallochum
11. *Vrinda vana*	from *Vrinda* or *Tulasi,* Ocimum sanctum

These forests are presided over by 12 Adityas, 11 Rudras, 8 Vasus, 7 Rishis, Brahma, Nanda, 5 Vinayakas (Moda, Pramoda, Amoda Sumukha, Durmukha), Viresvara, Rudresvara, Visvesvara, Gopalesvara, Bhadresvara and 24 Sivalingas.

Since very early times *Devadaru* is considered as an abode of gods and it may be because of the lofty, awe inspiring height that the tree attains. In the western Himalayas, particularly in the Kumaon hills and the Kulu valley, people hold the tree sacred and offer iron pieces as offerings to the gods dwelling on the trees. One often comes across trees studded with iron nails as a form of worship mainly to ward off illness, death, and destruction of cattle, sheep and crops. Like the worship of *Devadaru,* many other trees are also worshipped mainly because of the belief that tree spirits and deities dwell in them. Why iron nails are offered can only be explained from a common Indian belief that iron keeps the evil away. And may be, to the people worshipping the tree, it was not just the gods dwelling in the tree that was important but also the tree itself as it brought rain which was important in an agricultural economy.

Trees are worshipped for various reasons. In the Puri district of

[1]P.N. Sinha, *A Study of the Bhagavata Purana,* pp. 443, 452.
[2]This is very likely Ficus benghalensis which is a very large-sized tree and called *Bargad.*

Orissa, a *Tamala* tree in the compound of Sakhigopal temple is worshipped as an incarnation of Krishna. *Jhand* is revered in the Punjab. Very often a temple is erected near it or a stone deity placed under the tree with flags and streamers adorning its branches. The tree is worshipped for the gift of children. Sometimes marriage processions proceed to the tree before going to the bride's house and the bride goes to the tree for blessings before she enters her new home. Offerings are also made to the tree by smallpox patients.

Just as all animals are believed to possess a soul, similarly the belief that plants possess a soul is very strong. There are gods and goddesses of trees, shrubs and creepers. They even have a mother called Ira.[1] Ira, a daughter of Daksha was the mother of three daughters. *Lata* (creeper), *Valli* (creeping plants) and *Virudha*. They became in turn mothers of trees, plants and shrubs. *Lata* created creepers, flowerless plants growing in sandy regions, as well as trees with flowers and fruits. *Valli* created bushes and grasses of all kinds.[2] *Ira* means water and since the vegetable kingdom cannot subsist without water, Ira was the right choice of a mother for the plants. The association of the vegetation with a goddess is an old one dating back to the Harappa civilisation where terracotta figurines of naked female figures have been found with their legs wide apart and a plant issuing from their womb. Quoting from Banerjee,[3] "...the association of vegetation with the goddess is very well worked out in her *Sakambhari* aspect (*Markandeya Purana,* Devi Mahatmya, 91.48-9)." This association is still being emphasised in the *Navapatrika* ceremony of the autumn Durga worship in Bengal which shows that the Devi was in a way the personification of the vegetation spirit. According to the *Markandeya Purana*, 48.3-26 (468), plants and trees were created from the hair of Brahma's body.[4]

The *Navapatrika* or nine planets are *Rambha* associated with the Plantain, *Kachvi, Haridra, Jayanti, Bilva, Dadima, Asoka, Dhanya.* The nine goddesses presiding over the individual plants are: Brahmani, Kalika, Durga, Karttiki, Siva, Raktadantika, Sokarahita, Chamunda and Lakshmi respectively. These nine forms of Devi are the *Navadurgas*.

A reference to the *vanadevatas* or the tree spirits is made in Kalidasa's play *Sakuntala* where the *vanadevata* blesses Sakuntala as she leaves for her husband's home. A sculpture piece of the *Nyagrodha* tree at Mahabodhi near Gaya shows two human arms extended from the tree, one holding a plate full of food and the other containing a vessel with a

[1]V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purana: A Study,* p. 74.
[2]*Purana Index*, vol. I, p. 199.
[3]J.N. Banerjee, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp.489-90; Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 12.
[4]Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 236-38.

drink in it, towards a man who is ready to receive them.[1] The belief in tree spirits is not held by the Hindus only but is a very strong Buddhist belief also as seen from the Jataka stories.[2]

Marriage of boys and girls to trees is still being practised by certain tribes of India.[3] Among boys such a marriage is usually performed if the prediction is that his first marriage will break. By marrying him to a tree which is considered a female the tragedy is averted and later he is married to a girl and she is considered his second wife. In Orissa if a man loses two wives in succession, before he can be married for the third time, he is married to a tree of Strebulus asper or Morus alba before he is considered free of the curse of becoming a widower again, as the ill-luck is now carried by the tree he is married to. The same custom for girls however, has a different basis. An unmarried girl's body cannot be cremated and it is the sacred duty of her parents to marry her at the appropriate time to a boy of their own caste. But if the father fails to get her married, a marriage is solemnised between her and a tree after which the girl can be given away informally to any boy, even to a boy of a lower caste. Among the Kunbirs of Gujarat, if a man fails to provide a husband for his daughter, she is married to a bunch of flowers which are later thrown into a well after which the girl can marry anyone or she is simply given away to any man who is prepared to accept her. In some cases a girl is first married to a tree with a belief that she will imbibe some of the fertility of the tree, before she is married in the normal way to a man. Among the Gauras of Orissa, a girl who fails to get a husband is taken to a forest, married to a tree and left tied to it. She is rescued by the first man who comes that way and she becomes his wife informally. Mostly a youth of a lower caste is waiting for the family to depart before he takes her to his home.

So much importance was given to plants, particularly to trees that a whole ritual was laid for the felling of trees particularly for image making for worship. Not every wood was used for image making, nor could anyone worship an image unless it was sanctioned by the scriptures. Images for worship by the Brahmans are made from *Deodara, Chandan, Sami, Madhuka*; for Kshatriyas images are made out of *Arishta, Aswattha, Khadira, Bilva*; for Vaisyas from *Jivika, Khadira, Sindhuka, Syandana*; for Sudras out of *Tinduka, Kesara, Salya, Arjuna, Amra* and *Sala*.

The prescribed ritual for felling the selected tree was an elaborate one. The sculptor had to perform certain rites such as the marking off on its trunk the various portions of the image to be made. Next he had to propitiate the tree with various offerings and to worship at night the

[1]C. Sivaramamurti, *Sculpture Inspired by Kalidasa*, p. 12.
[2]*Jataka Stories,* Book I, pp. 253, 268; Book II, p. 276; Book IV, p. 97.
[3]Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 7; Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship of India*, p. 30.

gods, manes, *rakshasas, nagas, asuras, ganas,* and *vinayakas.* In the morning, after sprinkling water on the tree and smearing the blade of his axe with honey and clarified butter, he would cut round the tree rightwards, beginning from the north-east corner.[1]

Just as most gods and goddesses in India are associated with some tree, shrub, or creeper, similarly all the nine planets which are believed to control the destiny of man are associated with plants. Planet *Ravi* (Sun) after whom *Ravivara* or Sunday is named is offered the burnt offerings of *Arka* plant; *Palasa* is sacred to planet Soma (Moon) after whom *Somavara* or Monday is named. Planet *Mangala* (Mars), hence *Mangalavara* or Tuesday is identified with Karttikeya and *Khadira* is sacred to him. Planet *Budha* (Mercury), hence *Budhavara* or Wednesday has *Aparmarga* as its sacred plant. *Aswattha* is sacred to planet *Brihaspati* (Jupiter) after whom *Brihaspativara* or Thursday is named. The plant *Urumbasa* (cannot be identified botanically),[2] is sacred to the planet *Sukra* (Venus) and *Sukravara* or Friday is named after him. Saturday or *Sanivara* is named after the planet *Sani* (Saturn) and the plant sacred to it is *Sami. Dharbha ghas* is sacred to Rahu and blades of *Kusa ghas* to Ketu. Rahu and Ketu are not planets but the ascending and descending nodes and are accepted in Hindu astrology as planets.

Though generally speaking the Sikhs in India do not worship trees, yet a few specimens are held sacred by them. One is a tree of *Ber* growing in the compound of the Golden Temple at Amritsar which the Sikhs believe to be a tree that removes sorrow. Similarly, a tree of *Gauraunda* growing in a village called Badal in the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab is held in great reverence by the Sikhs. Near Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh is a tree of *Aonla,* one branch of which bears sweet fruit and the rest of the tree bears bitter-sour fruits. No doubt a case of mutation in the plant but the Sikhs hold the tree sacred under the belief that one of their Gurus once rested under this tree and the branch which gave him shade, since that time bears sweet fruits.

The origin of various plants is given in *Matsya Purana.*[3] The legend is that by the power of their penances, *rishis* Prachetasa (ten brothers), had earlier protected the plants but Agni, burnt them. The *rishis* then married Soma Kanya Marisha, the daughter of Soma and from their collective union was born Daksha. Daksha in turn produced on her innumerable plants and trees.

According to *Vamana Purana,*[4] the following plants arose as listed below:

[1]Banerjee, *Development of Hindu Iconography,* p. 205.
[2]*Urumbasa* could be Urena lobata Linn. F. Malvaceae; Malayalam name: *Uram.*
[3]Agarwala, *Matsya Purana: A Study,* p. 56; *Mahabharata,* vol. I, Vana Parva, p. 386.
[4]*Vamana Purana,* pp. 97-99.

1. Lotus from Vishnu's navel
2. *Kadamba* from the hand of Kandarpa
3. *Vata* from Manibhadra, chief of *yakshas*
4. *Dhatura* from the chest of Siva
5. *Khadira* from the middle body of Brahma
6. *Gorak imli* from the body of Visvakarma
7. *Kunda* flowers from the palm of Parvati
8. *Sindhuvaraka* from the temple of Ganesha
9. *Palasa* from the right side of Yama
10. *Udumbara* from the north-south side of Yama
11. *Vrsadrig* (bamboo) from Rudra
12. *Venu* (bamboo) from Skanda
13. *Aswattha* from Ravi, the Sun
14. *Sami* from Katyayani
15. *Bilva* from Lakshmi
16. Reeds from the Lord of serpents
17. *Durbha ghas* from Vasuki

The cult of tree worship is as old or older than civilisation, in fact almost the first objects held in reverence were trees. In India this is borne out by a seal discovered at Mohenjo-daro, now in Pakistan, which depicts *Aswattha* being worshipped. This seal dates back to the third-fourth millennium BC. The worship of trees in India is understandable as the trees not only provided shade in the hot scorching summers, food, medicine and fuel but the forests meant rain which was essential for a purely agricultural economy. The trees being beneficial to humanity, to protect them became a religion and were converted into the abode of tree spirits or *vanadevatas.* To cut down a tree meant depriving the spirit of its home and very often if it became imperative to cut down any tree, special prayers of forgiveness were performed before a tree was cut down or another abode offered to the *vanadevata.* Invariably it is not the tree that is worshipped but the spirit residing in them.

The identification of plants at times gets difficult as many of them have the same common name. Plants associated with gods and goddesses also differ in different parts of India thus making accurate assessment and identification impossible. Where common names of plants belong to more than one plant, only those plant names have been taken which fit in a particular context. Myths vary in different parts of India. If in one district a particular deity is worshipped with a certain plant, either the same plant is offered to a different deity or some other plant is considered sacred to the same deity, in a different parts of India.

1

ACACIA CATECHU Willd.

F. MIMOSACEAE

Sanskrit : Khadira
Hindi : Katha
English : Cutch Tree

Khadira wood is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists. There is a mention of it in the *Bhagavata Purana* and other ancient Indian texts. It also finds a mention in the Buddhist Jataka stories.

When Brahmadatta was the king of Benares, Bodhisatva was born as a wood-pecker and since he lived in a forest of Acacia trees, i.e., *Khadiravana*, he was called Khadiravaniya. He had a friend called Kandagalaka who was used to soft food like good fruit.

Once Kandagalaka visited Khadiravaniya and the latter took him into the Acacia woods and pecked at the tree until the insects came out and these he gave to his friend to eat. Kandagalaka was an arrogant bird and thought that he could himself get the insects to eat, then why should he be obliged to Khadiravaniya. When he told his intentions to his friend, Khadiravaniya said: "You are used to take your food from pithless silk-cotton trees and trees that bear abundant soft fruit. But *Khadira* is full of pith and is hard. You should not peck at it."

But Kandagalaka did not heed the warning given by his friend and pecked at the hard *Khadira* wood. The wood being hard, his beak snapped, his head split and he could not hold fast to the tree. He fell to the ground and died.

Bodhisattva identified the two and said: "Devadutta was Kandagalaka and Khadiravaniya was myself. This was not the first time that Devadutta had destroyed himself by imitating me."[1]

The dried pulp extracted from the wood of Acacia catechu is used as a paste for betel leaves. It has digestive and other medicinal properties. The inflorescence of *Khadira* is essential in marriage ceremonies in certain parts of India.

[1]*Jataka Stories*, Kandagalaka Jataka, Book II, pp. 113-14.

The sacrificial post is made of *Khadira* wood, also for lighting the sacrificial fire. The *Sruva,* sacrificial ladle is also made from its wood perhaps because the wood is very hard.[1]

2

AEGLE MARMELOS Correa ex Roxb.

F. RUTACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Bilva, Vilva
Hindi	:	Bel, Bael
English	:	Wood apple

Bilva is a medium-sized tree with three leaves arranged together and a crest of thick thorns. The three leaves together look like the *trishul,* or the trident, the emblem of Siva. These tri-foliate leaves signify the three functions of Siva: Creation, Preservation and Destruction. They also represent his three eyes. That is why *Bilva* leaves symbolically are believed to be effective in removing the sins of three births. The tree is sacred to Siva and is worshipped by his followers on the fourteenth phase of the moon's wane between the months of *Margasirsha* and *Phalguna* which is *Sivaratri* day.[2] On this day Siva's manifestation in phallic form is celebrated. The Sivalinga is bathed in milk, decorated and wrapped in *Bilva* leaves.

Bilva is considered as one of the important sacred trees and keeps on recurring in Hindu mythology. The following story is from *Brihaddharma Purana* as quoted by Gupta in his article on 'Tree Symbol Worship in Bengal.[3] Lakshmi, while worshipping Siva used to make a daily offering of one thousand lotus buds. One day when she was going to worship Siva, she found the lotus buds short by two. Just then she remembered that her husband Vishnu, had always compared her breasts to lotus buds, and she decided to cut off her breasts and substitute them for the missing lotus buds. As she cut off one breast, Siva satisfied with her worship of him and at her sacrifice, appeared before her and said that her cut breast (which was not placed on the ground and, therefore, did not become unclean), would grow into the *Bilva* tree.

[1]A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. I, pp. 213-14.
[2]E. Washburn Hopkins, *Religions of India,* p. 453.
[3]S. Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 130.

According to *Banihi Purana* and Tantric folklore,[1] Lakshmi was born as a sacred cow and from her dung arose the *Bilva* tree and thus became sacred. Since the tree is associated with Lakshmi, it is also called *Sri-vriksha,* the tree of prosperity and good fortune.

Another legend says that Lakshmi and Saraswati were both wives of Vishnu but Vishnu loved Saraswati more. Enraged, Lakshmi started the worship of Siva and was engaged in meditation for a very long time but Siva did not appear before her. After a while Lakshmi became the *Bilva* tree and now Siva dwells in the tree.

According to a legend,[2] a hunter was trying to shoot a deer. He climbed a *Bilva* tree and getting bored waiting, to kill time he started plucking the leaves of the tree and throwing them down. Under the tree was installed a Sivalinga. The hunter had a vision of Siva telling him, 'I make myself visible to you for it is not the way you worship that is important but the worship itself', even the accidental fall of leaves on the Sivalinga, gave the hunter a vision of Siva. From that day onwards, the tree and its trifoliate leaves became sacred.

A different version of the story is:[3] Sundara Sen, the vicious king of Arunda went out hunting. Getting tired, he took rest in a bower of *Bilva* trees. There was a Sivalinga in the bower and *Bilva* leaves fell on it because the king plucked them. Plucking leaves made the dust rise and to lay down the dust, the king brought water from the nearby river and sprinkled it on the tree. Some water dripped down on the Sivalinga. An arrow fell down from the king's quiver and he bent to pick it up. As he bent down, his chest touched the Sivalinga. Having touched, bathed and worshipped the emblem of Siva with *Bilva* leaves on the night of the *vratam,* i.e., a fast kept on *Sivaratri,* the king got his vision of Siva.

Another interesting legend is as follows:[4] Once in the city of Pataliputra ruled a king called Vikramatunga. He had the reputation of never turning his back on a suppliant nor in fighting an enemy. The king one day entered a forest to hunt and saw a Brahman offering a *Bilva* fruit to the Sivalinga. The king did not disturb him and went ahead with the chase. Hours later, on his return from the chase, he found the Brahman still continuing the sacrifice as before. The king got curious and going upto the Brahman, asked him what merit he was going to gain by offering *Bilva* fruit.

The Brahman named Nagasarman answered: 'When the God of Fire is pleased with this *Bilva* fruit as a sacrifice in the *yajna,* then *Bilva* fruits

[1]Ibid., p. 95.
[2]Abbe I.A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies,* p. 707.
[3]M.N. Dutt, *Garuda Purana,* p. 365.
[4]N.M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. III, pp. 159-61.

of gold will come out of the fire. The God of Fire will appear in bodily form and grant me a boon. That is why I have spent so much time offering *Bilva* fruits. But so little is my merit that even now the God of Fire has not listened to my prayers or accepted my sacrifices."

The king then said: "Give me a *Bilva* fruit so that I may offer and I will today, O Brahman, render the God of Fire propitious to you."

The Brahman answered: "How will you, unchaste and impure propitiate the God of Fire who is not satisfied with me who has always remained faithful to my vow and am pure?"

The king answered: "Never mind. Give me a *Bilva* fruit and in a moment you will see a wonder."

The Brahman, full of wonder and curiosity, gave a *Bilva* fruit to the king. The king meditated for a while and offering the *Bilva* fruit to the sacrificial fire, said: "If thou art not satisfied with this *Bilva* fruit, O God of Fire, then I will offer you my own head."

Arising from the sacrificial fire, a seven-rayed god appeared before the king, bringing a golden *Bilva* fruit, as a reward for his valour and addressing the king said: "I am pleased with your courage, so receive a boon, O king."

The king bowed before the God of Fire and said: "Grant this Brahman his wish. What other boon do I require."

The God of Fire answered: "O king, this Brahman will become a lord of wealth and by my favour your treasury will always remain full."

The Brahman addressed the God of Fire and said: "Thou hast appeared swiftly to a king who acts according to his own will, but not to me who am under vows. Why is this, O revered one?"

The God of Fire, the giver of boons answered: "If I had not granted him what he desired, then this king of fierce courage would have offered his head in sacrifice. In this world success quickly comes to those of fierce spirit but comes slowly, O Brahman, to those of dull spirit like yours." Saying this the God of Fire vanished. Brahman, Nagasarman took leave of the king and because of the boon given to him by the God of Fire, he became rich.

According to certain tribes of India,[1] the tree sprang from the testes of a pig, an animal that is considered unclean. This shows the great gap that exists between the orthodox Hindu thought and that of the tribes. Naturally, therefore, most tribal people do not consider the tree sacred. The Gauria snake-charmers of Madhya Pradesh believe,[2] that an appeal to the *Bilva* tree and to Dhanwantri, the physician of gods, cures snake bite.

[1]Verrier, Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa,* p. 114.
[2]R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas,* vol. II, p. 271.

Before the start of the battle between Ramachandra and Ravana, Brahma took Rama to a *Bilva* tree growing on the sea shore, to invoke Devi on the *Krishnanavami tithi.* Rama eulogised Devi and she assured him with a voice from heaven that he would be victorious.

A fallen tree is never used as firewood and though its fruit is highly valued, people from Kerala never eat it as it signifies the head of Siva.[1] *Bilva* leaves are offered to Siva on Mondays in the month of *Sravana.* Its wood is included in the *homa* ceremony and the fruit is said to promote fertility.

Bilva fruit is highly medicinal and cures diseases of the skin by purifying the blood. The fruit having come from the milk of Sri, the Goddess Lakshmi, it is a remedy for dysentery.

The tree is planted on the north side of the house.

3

ANTHOCEPHALUS CADAMBA Miq.

F. Rubiaceae

Sanskrit	:	Kadamba
Hindi	:	Kadam
English	:	Kadamba

This is the *Kadamba* tree[2] popularly associated with Krishna. Krishna dancing with Radha and his favourite *gopis* under this tree is a favourite theme of the Krishna-Radha legend and is often represented in miniature paintings. The tree is held sacred by the followers of Krishna and its flowers are offered at the temples dedicated to him in memory of his swinging from its branches and dancing under the tree with the milk-maids of Vrindavana. Krishna stole the clothes of the milk-maids while they were bathing in the river Yamuna and took them upon the *Kadamba* tree.[3]

According to a Puranic legend, the distillation of liquor is associated with the *Kadamba* tree. Seshanaga, the great serpent who supports the earth, was on his wanderings in the forest with his companions in the

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 95
[2]H.H. Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* pp. 136, 452; Elwin, *Myths of Middle India,* pp. 131, 336-37; John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology,* p. 40.
[3]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. VIII, p. 214

guise of a mortal, i.e., Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna. Lord Varuna wanted to provide him with recreation and ordered his wife Varuni, the goddess of wine to go and regale the powerful Ananta or Seshanaga and make him happy. Obeying the commands of her husband, Varuni as *madira* or wine, went and hid herself in the hollow of a *Kadamba* tree growing in the vicinity of Vrindavana. Baladeva (another name of Balarama) was roaming in the forest and smelled the fragrance of liquor and his old passion for strong drink was resumed. Seeing drops of liquor dripping from the *Kadamba* tree, he was delighted and gathering them, drank it with his herdsmen and the *gopis*. Balarama got drunk and in his drunken state called river Yamuna to come near him as he wished to bathe. The river disregarded the wishes of a man who was drunk. Balarama got enraged at the audacity of Yamuna and plunged his ploughshare into the river and dragged her, compelling the river to follow him wherever he went. From that day onwards Balarama and the *Kadamba* tree came to be associated together. Till today Yamuna river is believed to take the same course that Balarama had compelled her to take in his drunken state. Though the *Kadamba* tree is associated with the exudation of liquor, in fact wine does not exude from it but its flowers are said to yield a spirit on distillation. The name Kadambari is a synonym of wine.

In *Vishnu Purana*,[1] is a mention of the four sacred mountains: Mandara, Gandhamadana, Vipula and Suparsva and on each of them grows a tree, *Kadamba, Jambu, Aswattha, Vata,* each tree spreading over 1100 *yojanas* and towering like banners. In the *Bhagavata Purana,* a mango tree is present on mount Mandara; *Jambu* on Merumandara; *Vata* on Kamunda and *Kadamba* on mount Suparsva. The original *Kadamba* tree grows on the Gomantha mountain, one of the mythical sacred mountains of Hindu mythology. Lohitayani, the nurse of Skanda is worshipped under a *Kadamba* tree.[2]

[1]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* p. 136.
[2]Edward Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* p. 67.

4

ARUNDO DONAX Linn.

F. Gramineae; Poaceae

Sanskrit	:	Nalaka
Hindi	:	Bari-nari
English	:	Cane sticks, Great reed, Spanish cane

The great master Buddha once on an alms pilgrimage with his disciples came to a village called *Nalaka-pana* named after a pond with reeds growing in it. They were staying in the *Ketaka-vana,* a forest of Pandanus plants, near the pond of *Nalaka-pana* where grew the cane sticks. The cane sticks those days were solid and the novices used to gather them to make needle cases out of them. Seeing the forest of *Nalaka-pana,* Buddha narrated the following story, an event which had occurred in a previous birth.

Once Bodhisattva was born as the king of monkeys and lived in a forest near this pool with his 80,000 followers. One day the monkeys came to a spot that they had not visited before. They were thirsty but instead of drinking the water of the lake, they waited for Bodhisattva, their king to come. Bodhisattva on arrival, took a round circle of the lake and scrutinised the foot prints round it and noticed that footsteps led down into the water but none came out. He realised that the lake was the haunt of a ogre and was glad that none of his followers had gone down to the lake to drink water.

When the ogre realised that the monkeys were not coming down, he came out of the water and finding all of them sitting on the banks of the lake, addressed their Master and asked him why the monkeys were not going down to the lake to drink water. Bodhisattva, asked him if he was the ogre who ate up the animals that went to drink water at the lake. The ogre replied in the affirmative and also disclosed his intentions of eating all the monkeys when they went to the lake. The Bodhisattva told him that the monkeys would drink the water of the lake but without going down to it, and the ogre would not be able to eat them.

The Bodhisattva had a cane brought to him and after meditating on the Ten Perfections, he recited them and blew down the cane. The cane became hollow without a single knot being left in all its length. Then he made a round of the lake and commanded all canes to become hollow. After the canes became hollow, he and each of the 80,000 monkeys took a hollow cane in their hands and sucked the water up

through them and the ogre could not catch them.[1]

The ogre in the story was Devadutta; the 80,000 monkeys were the disciples of the Buddha and the monkey king was Bodhisattva himself.

The cane-sticks are tall, stout perennial grasses with a hollow stem. They are common all over India and are distributed westwards to Europe, north Africa and north Asia.

5

BOMBAX CEIBA Linn. Syn.

Salmalia malabaricum (DC) Schott & Endl.

F. BOMBACACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Salmali
Hindi	:	Simbal
English	:	Red silk cotton tree

Why the *Salmali* tree has thorns on its trunk is mentioned in the *Mahabharata.*[2] Draupadi was the common wife of the five Pandava brothers. She had to be shared alike by all the five brothers and was pledged not to show favour to anyone of her husbands. She used to daily massage each one of her five husbands. Bhimasena got jealous of the other four and did not want her to massage them. But because of the vow taken by her, he could do nothing about it. To show his resentment, he decided to play a prank on Draupadi. One day he put a log of *Salmali* in his bed and covered it with a sheet. The *Salmali* treee those days had smooth branches and trunk and no thorns grew on them. Then he sent for Draupadi to come and massage him as he was in great pain. Draupadi hurried to his bed-chamber and without even removing the sheet, started massaging the log of wood thinking that it was her husband. She kept on massaging the log of wood for a while and finding it inert and getting tired of the effort, she removed the sheet and saw that all the time she had been massaging a log of wood. Bhimasena had been hiding in the room all the while. Seeing her consternation at finding a log of wood, he burst out laughing. Feeling ridiculed and annoyed, Draupadi cursed the wood and said: "Let thorns grow on it so that no

[1] *Jataka Stories,* Nalapana, pp. 54-55.
[2] Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa,* p. 121.

other woman is put in an awkward position of having to massage it." Draupadi's curse came true, Bhimasena took the piece of wood and planted it in his garden. It took root and grew into a tall tree but bears thorns on it till today.

Among certain Oriyan tribes, the tree is believed to be the favourite haunt of Bhut ambae, a female ghost who appears in a dream to young men to rob them of their virility.

Salmali is a favourite tree in Hindu mythology. There is a reference to it in the *Mahabharata.*[1] Once Yudhishthira sought the advice of Bhishma as how to act when a weak, worthless and light-hearted person, relying on his strength and having provoked by his speeches, a powerful foe residing in the vicinity, advances against him in wrath with the intention of exterminating him. Bhishma answered by narrating the following discourse that took place once between a *Salmali* tree and Pavana, wind personified. There was a large *Salmali* tree growing on Himavat. The tree had been growing there for many centuries and its branches had spread far and wide, with a huge trunk and countless leaves. It was loaded with flowers and fruits and was the home of innumerable parrots. Under its shade, travellers from far and wide, caravans of merchants, ascetics going on pilgrimage as well as elephants and many other animals used to take shelter. One day, Rishi Narada seeing the wide spreading tree addressed him saying that he was delighted by its sight, particularly as birds of diverse types lived on its branches and animals rested under its shade. Seeing the intact branches and leaves of the tree, he attributed it to the friendship and goodness of Pavana, the god of wind, who normally by its great speed and force uproots the tallest and the strongest tree, breaks the summits of mountains not to speak of drying up rivers, lakes and oceans, including the very nether regions. Narada kept on emphasising the goodness of Pavana and the friendship he showed to the *Salmali* tree which was responsible for the continued protection of the tree.

Salmali was arrogant and did not like Narada's praise of Pavana and answered: "The Wind, O regenerate one, is neither my friend nor mate nor well-wisher. He is neither my protector. My fierce energy and might, O Narada, are greater than the Wind's. In truth, the strength of the Wind comes upto only an eighteenth part of mine. When the Wind comes in rage tearing up trees and mountains and other things, I curb his strength by putting forth mine. The Wind that breaks many things has himself been repeatedly broken by me. For this reason, O celestial *rishi,* I am not afraid of him even when he comes in wrath."

[1] *Mahabharata,* vol. VII, Drona Parva, p. 363.

Narada was infuriated at this reply of *Salmali,* and admonishing him at his arrogance said: "Your perception seems to be thoroughly perverse. There is no created being who is equal to the Wind in strength. Even Indra, Yama, Varuna, and Vaisravana, the lord of waters is not equal to the God of Wind in might. What need, therefore, be said of you who is only a tree? Whichever creature in this world does anything, it is the illustrious Wind-god who is the cause of that act since it is he who is the giver of life. You are worthless and of wicked understanding. O *Salmali,* I am angry with you for indulging in such talk. *Chandanas,* and *Syandanas, Salas, Saralas, Devadarus, Vatasas,* and *Dhanwanas,*[1] and other trees with good souls are far stronger than you have ever been. O you of wicked understanding, how dare you utter such invectives against the Wind. Other trees know the might of Wind and bow down their heads in respect for the Wind-god. You through folly do not know the infinite might of Wind. I will, therefore, go to the Wind-god and appraise him of your contempt for him."

Narada went to the God of Wind and related the conversation he had with *Salmali* and told him the derogative way *Salmcli* had spoken of him. Pavana, the God of Wind was wild with rage and approaching *Salmali* addressed him: "Know that I am the God of Wind? I have so far shown you grace because Brahma while engaged in creating the world, had rested for a time under you. It is for this that you stand unharmed and not because of your might. I will now show you my power and strength."

Salmali laughed and answered, "By giving way to your wrath what will you do to me. I am superior to you in might. They are really strong that are strong in understanding, not those who possess only physical strength."

Narada related this conversation to Vayu, the Wind-god. Then night fell and the Wind-god said: "Tomorrow I will test his strength."

Salmali, left alone, realised that he was indeed inferior to the Wind-god as well as to other trees so far as physical strength was concerned, but considered himself more intelligent than the other trees. He thought and decided, "Relying on my intelligence, no harm can come to me, when the God of Wind comes in anger shaking and tearing. I will look at this fear that arises from the Wind. If other trees of the forest all rely on their intelligence, then no harm can come to them." Having decided that, *Salmali,* in sorrow, himself cut off his branches. Without its branches, foliage and flowers, the tree faced the Wind-god in the morning as it came raging towards it, ready to uproot the tree. Seeing the forlorn state of *Salmali,* the Wind-god addressed him: "Filled with rage, I would

[1]*Santalum album, Dalbergia sissoo, Shorea robusta, Pinus roxburghii, Cedrus deodara, Calamus glabra, Terminalia arjuna* respectively.

have done to you precisely what you have done to yourself. You are now divested of your proud top of flowers, branches and leaves. As a result of your own evil counsel, you have been brought under my powers."

After narrating the story of *Salmali* and Pavana to Yudhishthira, Bhishma continued: "Hearing these words of the Wind-god, *Salmali* felt great shame. Similarly, a weak and a foolish person by provoking a powerful enemy is at last obliged to repent like *Salmali* had to."

Salmali is considered sacred because Brahma, the Creator, after completing the creative act was exhausted and rested under its shade. *Kuta-Salmali* is a mythical tree whose leaves are sharp as swords. Though its blossoms are of gold, it is loaded with thorns of iron and beryl.[1] It is called the torture tree or the tree of hell. The tree is also called *Yamadrumma,* Yama being the God of Death. This name of the tree is because the tree has a large number of flowers but no fruits fit to eat. Its wood is used in the funeral pyres.[2]

A large *Salmali* tree grows on the mythical Salmalia *dvipa,* giving its name to the island. The island is surrounded by the Sura sea or the sea of wine.

6

BUTEA MONOSPERMA (Lam.) Kuntze syn. Butea frondosa Koenig ex Roxb.

F. Papilionaceae; Fabaceae

Sanskrit	:	Kimsuka, Plaksha
Hindi	:	Palas, Dhak, Teysu
English	:	Flame of the forest, Parrot tree, Judas tree

The tree is considered sacred both by Hindus and Buddhists.[3] The Hindus consider it sacred because of the trifoliate formation of its leaves which represents the Holy trinity of Vishnu the Preserver in the middle, Brahma the Creator on the left and Siva the Destroyer on the right.

The tree is associated with the moon and is believed to have sprung

[1]Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, pp. 111, 193.

[2]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* pp. 135, 164.

[3]The following plants also have the same common name Butea superba Roxb. Sanskrit and Bengali: *lata palasha*; Hindi: *palaslata; Ficus arnottiana Miq., F. lucescens Blume, syn F. infectoria Roxb., Syn. F. lacor Buch-Ham, F. Talboti King*; Sanskrit: *Plaksha.*

from the feather of a falcon imbued with Soma, the intoxicating drink of gods and is thus immortalised.[1]

It is a common practice to use the leaves of the tree in ceremonies connected with blessing the calves to ensure their becoming good milkers.[2] Dry twigs of the plant are used in the sacred fire Homa. It's wood is sacrificial and is mentioned in the Vedas. From the wood are made utensils used for sacred purposes. The staff placed in the hands of a Brahman boy at the time of his thread ceremony is made from the *Plaksha* wood. When a Brahman renounces the worldly life and becomes a sadhu and his hair are being shorn, he is given the *Plaksha* leaf to eat or else he must eat off *Plaksha* leaves.

The orange red flowers of the tree are offered to the gods; especially to goddess Kali. In the spring festival of *Holi,* a dye made from its flower is used to sprinkle the passers-by. Since the festival of *Holi* is associated with Krishna, the tree has come to be associated also with him. Red being the colour of passion, a young man smearing the face of a maiden with dye made from the flowers of *Plaksha* is supposed to have erotic significance. Amir Khusru, a Sufi poet, compared the flowers of the tree to lion's claw stained with blood. In Indian poetry its flower are compared to the new nail marks on the body of the beloved. A Rigvedic hymn describes the bridal chariot adorned with its flowers, (*Su-Kimsuka*). *Palasa patram* or a vessel made of *Palasa* wood was used by the trees for milking the cow earth. Its wood is used in ceremonies connected with *Krishna-ashtami vratam* and the digging of tanks.[3]

Plaksha tree is associated with Brahma also because of the following legend.[4] Once Siva and Parvati were engaged in an amorous dalliance. The *devatas* and celestial beings ordered Agni *devata* to visit them in the guise of a Brahman. Seeing Agni intrude on their privacy, Parvati cursed the whole host of gods and deities to be born as trees. Because of the curse, Brahma was converted into the *Plaksha* tree, Vishnu into *Aswattha* and Rudra into the *Vata* tree.

Buddhists associate the tree in flower to penitents dressed in orange red. Orange red colour being the colour of flame, it is worn symbolically by those who have burnt all their desires. The tree often figures in Buddhist Jatakas. One of the story relates,[5] "King Brahmadatta of Benares had four sons. They sent for their charioteer and expressed a desire to

[1]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa,* p. 122; E. Blatter and W.S. Millard, *Some Beautiful Indian Trees,* p. 16.

[2]D.V. Cowen, *Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India,* p. 4.

[3]*Purana Index,* vol. II, pp. 322, 450. It mentions *Sami* as *monosperma. Sami* is *Prosopis cineraria Druce syn. P. spicigera.*

[4]*Padma Purana,* Uttarakanda as quoted in Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 115.

[5]*Jataka Stories,* Kimsukopama Jataka, Book II, pp. 184-85.

see the *Kimsuka* tree. The charioteer, instead of taking the four brothers together to see the *Kimsuka* tree, showed them the tree separately and at different seasons. One son saw the tree when buds were sprouting, the second when the leaves were green; the third when the tree was in blossom and the fourth when the tree was bearing fruit.

After they had all seen the tree, they were asked their opinion regarding the type of tree that *Kimsuka* was. The four brothers having seen the tree at different seasons, their impressions differed from each other's. The elder brother having seen the tree when buds were sprouting from it, said that it looked like a burnt stump. The tree bears buds covered with greenish-black bracts when it is without foliage and stems are completely bare. Second brother's impressions were that it looked like a banyan tree as he had seen the tree decked in green foliage. Its green, coarse, ovoid-shaped leaves resemble the leaves of a banyan tree except that the banyan tree does not have trifoliate leaves. The third brother thought that the tree resembled a piece of meat as he had seen the tree full of flowers. Flowers of *Kimsuka* are orange-red in colour. The fourth compared the tree to an Acacia tree as it was in fruit when he had seen it.

The brothers were perplexed at each other's answer and went to their father, the king, for an explanation. The king answered: "All of you have seen the tree but at a different season but none of you asked the charioteer what the tree looked like in other seasons and so all of you are in doubt."

Similarly, four brothers had approached the Tathagata and asked for means by which ecstasy could be induced Tathagata explained the various ways of attaining ecstasy. One of them learnt the Six Spheres of Touch and became a saint; second by learning the Five Elements of Being; third after learning the Four Principal Elements; fourth after learning the Eighteen Constituents of Being. One of the brothers was in a doubt and said: "There is only one *Nirvana* for all those modes of meditation, how is it that all of them lead to sainthood?"

Tathagata was born as king Brahmadatta of Benares. He had the four sons who saw the *Kimsuka* tree at different times of the year. These were the same four brothers who in a previous birth had asked the Tathagata about the ways of attaining *Nirvana.* During the reign of Brahmadatta of Benares,[1] Bodhisattva was born in the form of a *Kimsuka* tree spirit.[2]

The plant is highly Medicinal.

[1]The city of Benares has been renamed as Varanasi.

[2]*Jataka Stories,* Palasa Jataka, p. 15.

7

COCCULUS CORDIFOLIUS
syn. Tinospora Cordifolia (Willd.) Miers ex Hook.f. & Thoms.

FAMILY MENISPERMACEAE

Hindi & Sanskrit	:	Gaduchi, Galuchi, Amrita
English	:	Rain of nectar

The plant is held sacred because of a legend in the *Ramayana*.[1] The demon king Ravana was enamoured of Sita, the wife of Ramachandra and wished to make her his wife, and, by doing so he hoped to avenge insult to his sister Surpanakha whose nose had been chopped off by Lakshmana, the younger brother of Ramachandra. Ravana played a ruse on them and removed Ramachandra and Lakshmana by his magic powers from the cottage where Sita lived with her husband and brother-in-law, by creating a golden deer which Sita desired. To catch the deer, the two brothers chased it to a great distance. In their absence Ravana appeared before Sita in the guise of a mendicant and asked for alms. Left undefended she was taken away forcibly by Ravana to his kingdom of Lanka. A great battle followed Sita's abduction. To rescue her, Ramachandra with his army of monkeys attacked Lanka and killed Ravana. Sita was atlast rescued. Indra, the king of gods was happy at the fall of Ravana and at the removal of evil. He brought back to life all the *vanaras*, i.e., monkeys killed in the battle by spraying the elixir of life on them. Some of the nectar fell on earth and wherever drops of it fell, plants of *Gaduchi* sprang up and because of their origin from the nectar, they were immortalised and are, therefore held sacred.

Gaduchi is a medicinal plant, yielding a bitter medicine given to children for various ailments.

[1]Dwivedi's translation of *Bhavaprakasa Nighantu*, p. 142; Donald A. Mackenzie, *Indian Myths and Legends*, p. 404.

8

COCOS NUCIFERA Linn.

FAMILY PALMAE; ARECACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Narikel
Hindi	:	Nariel
English	:	Coconut palm

Fresh coconut fruit is an essential part of all Hindu religious ceremonies. Even in areas where the coconut palm does not grow, no *puja* or offering is complete till a coconut is offered. If a son, brother or a husband is going on a long journey, the mother, the sister or the wife applies *tilak* on his forehead, wishing him well and offers him a coconut. In south Indian temples, the priests will not accept offerings of a devotee, if it does not contain a coconut. Similarly at weddings and other auspicious occasions, a coconut is placed at the *pandal* erected for the ceremony. Usually a pitcher of water is placed on paddy, a branch of the mango tree is placed in the pitcher and a coconut adorned with sandalpaste, vermilion and flowers are placed on that branch. This is called the full pitcher.... *Purnakumbha*, which is symbolically invoked as gods and goddesses for the successful end to any mission undertaken.[1]

As often happens with customs the world over, the meaning behind a ritual is lost but the symbol is retained, so it is with the offering of the coconut fruit. Long ago, human sacrifice used to take place in India to propitiate the deity Bhadrakali. But as time passed and people got enlightened, human sacrifice gave place to the sacrifice of animals and finally to the symbolic offering of a coconut which with its round and fibrous covering, the mesocrap, resembles a human head and the two dark spots on it represent the two eyes. This is the closest resemblance of any member of the vegetable kingdom to a human head. For this reason it is offered as a symbolic human sacrifice.

The legend connected with its origin,[2] is that Rishi Viswamitra practised severe austerities for a long time and in the end acquired superhuman powers. To prove his prowess, he decided to send Satyavrata to heaven in his mortal body. Satyavrata had been exiled from his kingdom by his father for seducing the wife of a citizen. During the period of exile, there was a severe famine and Satyavrata looked after the wife and children of Viswamitra while the latter was away. Since Satyavrata desired

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India*, p. 28.

[2]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, p. 297; Dawson, *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, pp. 366-67; H.P. Sastri, *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, vol. I, Bala Kanda, pp. 111-17.

to reach heaven in his mortal body, Viswamitra repayed him for having looked after his family by fulfilling his desire and raised him to heaven in his mortal body inspite of strong opposition from sages and gods. When Satyavrata reached Indra's heaven in his mortal body, Indra was furious: "How can a mortal reside in my domain in his earthly body? Only souls are permitted." Feeling annoyed at the audacity of Rishi Viswamitra, he hurled Satyavrata's body out of his domain. When Rishi Viswamitra saw this, he was indignant. His very first effort was coming to naught. For Satyavrata's body to come back to earth not only meant insult but also an acceptance of defeat at Indra's hands. So Viswamitra used his magical powers again and stopped the king from falling to the earth. This resulted in Satyavrata being suspended in the air. To prop him, Viswamitra put a pole under him. In course of time, the pole became the coconut palm which is as straight and unbranched as the pole which Rishi Viswamitra had taken to stop his further fall. Satyavrata remained suspended in mid-air and got the epithet Trisanku, one who is neither here nor there. Coconut fruit has a coarse outer fibrous covering which symbolically resemble the hair of the king and two prominent black spots on the outside, his eyes.

Coconut fruit fulfils one's desires,[1] and is offered to deities. It is also considered a symbol of Siva because it has three black spots and Siva has three eyes. In Gujarat the bride offers a coconut to her bridegroom and he preserves it throughout his life. In Mysore, it is worshipped as a family god. Coconut is also worshipped as Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

9

CYNODON DACTYLON Pers.

FAMILY GRAMINEAE; POACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Durva ghas, Haritali
Hindi	:	Durbha, Dubha, Hariali
English	:	Dhub grass, Bermuda or Bahama grass

Durva ghas,[2] if often mentioned in the *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda* where it is used as a charm against baldness and anger.[3]

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India*, p. 11.

[2]A large number of grasses are called *Durva* but the plant associated with the legends is *Cynodon dactylon* (see *Desmostachya bipinnata*).

[3]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, vol. I, p. 340.

There are different versions associated with the origin of *Durva* but they all spring from the same source namely the legend of the churning of the milky ocean to extract *amrita*. According to one version, when the sea of milk was churned by the *devatas* and the *daityas*, with the help of Mount Mandara as the churning stick and serpent Vasuki as the churning rope, in order to extract *amrita* from the ocean, which could make the drinker immortal, *Durva ghas* made its appearace. (See *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis.*)

Another version of the story is,[1] that Vishnu who in his *Kurma* or Turtle incarnation was supporting the mountain Mandara was used as the churning rod, it rubbed off a great many of the god's hair. These hair were cast ashore by the waves. They took root and became *Durva ghas*.

The third story mentions that as the drink of immortality arose, the gods got hold of the vessel containing *amrita* and greedily drank it lest the *asuras* snatch away the vessel from them. In the haste, a few drops of the precious drink fell on the grass growing on earth and thus became immortal. This was *Durva ghas*.

The fourth version of the story mentions the appearance of a courtesan of exceptional beauty called Mohini, who in fact was Vishnu himself in disguise. Mohini carrying the vessel containing *amrita* was the last one to emerge out of the ocean of milk. Seeing the vessel, a fight ensued between the *devatas* and the *daityas* for the possession of the nectar. Mohini however, favoured the *devatas* and supporting the precious vessel on her hips, distributed the contents to the gods. A few drops of nectar fell on earth from where arose the *Durva ghas*. This grass is also considered sacred as it grew from the perspiration of Vishnu. It is a remover of sin because in its roots Brahma resides, in its middle Vishnu and at the top, Siva. Vaishnavites consider the grass as Vishnu himself and its use in all religious ceremonies is essential for it possesses the virtue of purifying everything. The plant is also sacred to Ganesha and except Durga, it is used in the worship of all gods and goddesses.

An annual feast is celebrated in honour of the plant on the eighth day of the moon in *Bhadra*, called *Durva-ashtami*. By offering *Durva* as a sacrifice on that day, with its tips facing east, immortality and blessedness for ten ancestors is secured. The prosperity of the person making the offering increases and multiplies like the *Durva ghas* which is a prolific multiplier of the vegetable kingdom.

Durva ghas is found everywhere except in damp marshy ground. A *pavitram*, i.e., an amulet made of 3, 5, 7 stalks of *Durva*, plaited together

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, vol. I, pp. 55-56; Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp. 150-51, 651-52.

in the form of a ring is worn by Brahmans to scare away evil spirits and devils. The *pavitram* sanctified by dipping in holy water and placed on the ring finger of the right hand is efficacious as it possesses the virtue of purifying everything that it touches.[1]

10

DESMOSTACHYA BIPINNATA Stapf.

syn. Eragrostis cynasuroides Beauv.

FAMILY GRAMINEAE; POACEAE

Sanskrit : Kusa or Darbha ghas
Hindi : Kusha, Dab, Durva

The story of the origin of *Kusa ghas*,[2] is given in the *Ramayana*. Ramachandra left his wife Sita after they returned from fourteen years exile, doubting her chastity and fidelity on mere heresay because she had been kidnapped by Ravana and kept in his palace gardens (see *Cocculus cordifolius*). Ramachandra did this because he wished to be an ideal king and did not want his people to slander Sita. Sita was pregnant at that time but even then she was sent to the forest to live in the ashrama of Rishi Valmiki. There she gave birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusa. When the sons grew up and met their father, Ramachandra realised the injustice he had done to his wife by forsaking her. Sita's feeling of humiliation, shame and anger at having been forsaken by him even after she had undergone the fire ordeal to prove her innocence, rose. She did not wish to go back to him. Sita being the daughter of Dharani, the goddess of earth, she prayed to the mother earth to accept her back if she was innocent. An earthquake occurred at that moment, the earth opened where Sita was standing and she was buried under it. Seeing their mother being swallowed by the earth, her son Kusa ran forward to save her but all that he could get hold of were Sita's hair which as the earth closed were left above the ground and turned into grass. This grass was named after Kusa as he had tried to save her and since that time the grass is held sacred.

[1]Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp. 150-51, 651-52.
[2]Also identified as *Cynodon dactylon*.

A story in the *Bhagavata Purana*,[1] is that Sita gave birth to only one son named Lava. She was in the habit of leaving him behind in the ashrama when she went for her bath in the river. But one day, unknown to Valmiki, she took the child with her. Not finding the child in the hut, Valmiki thought that the child had been carried away by a wild beast and afraid that Sita might die of grief at the loss of her child, made a baby with *Kusa ghas* resembling Lava and placed him in Lava's cot. When Sita returned with Lava, she was surprised to find another boy resembling Lava, lying in his cot and asked Rishi Valmiki how this second child came to be there. Valmiki told her of what had taken place and said: "Blameless one, receive this second son named Kusa because I, by my power have created him out of *Kusa ghas*." Sita brought up the two sons Lava and Kusa for whom Valmiki performed the sacraments.

One day the two boys killed and ate a deer belonging to the ashrama and made a play thing of Valmiki's sacred Sivalinga. Valmiki was greatly offended but at Sita's intercession the boys were forgiven. Sita asked Lava to bring gold coloured lotus flowers and *Mandara* flowers from Kubera's garden, to make a *linga* with the flowers and worship that *linga*, and only then their crime could be atoned.

According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*,[2] Sita gave birth to twin sons. Valmiki performed the *Rakshasa* rites to avert the evil eye. Taking a handful of *Kusa ghas* along with its roots, he performed the rites for the protection of the boys and for the destruction of evil forces, saying that since the first born will be rubbed with the *Kusa ghas* and blessed by *mantras* to avert the evil eye, his name shall be Kusa, and as the second born will be carefully dried by the female ascetics with *Kusa ghas*, he shall be called Lava.

The sacredness and immortality of *Kusa ghas* is also because of its having been sprinkled with *Amrita*.[3] Vinata and Kadru were both wives of Kasyapa. When the Ocean of Milk was being churned, the horse Uchchaihsravas came out of the ocean. Without seeing the horse, Vinata and Kadru had a wager. Vinata said that the horse was pure white in colour. Kadru said that the horse was white but had black spots on his tail. According to the bet, whoever lost, had to become the slave of the other. When Kadru realised that the horse was indeed pure white, she ordered her children, the snakes to go and attach themselves to the tail of the horse, with the result, from a distance the horse appeared to have a black tail. Vinata lost the bet and became a slave of Kadru and had to suffer untold misery. Kadru finally agreed to release her, provided she

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, vol. IV, pp. 127-29.
[2]Sastri, *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Uttara Kanda, p. 568.
[3]*Mahabharata*, vol. I, Astika Parva, p. 91.

could get *amrita,* for her. To free his mother from the bondage of slavery, her son Garuda, stole the *amrita* from Indra's heaven. As he was flying with the pot containing *amrita,* he got tired and placed the pot on *Kusa ghas.* A few drops of the drink of immortality fell on the grass and since then the grass has become sacred to Hindus. The *nagas* licked the sharp-edged grass which had drops of *amrita* on them and from then on their tongues have a cleft.[1]

According to a legend in the *Mahabharata,*[2] Rishi Manakanaka was the son of Vayu, the God of Wind, and Sukanya, the daughter of Saryati and wife of Cyavana. Manakanaka in his youth led the life of a Brahmacharya. Later, while performing his ablutions in the river, he saw a woman of faultless limb and fair of complexion bathing in the river Saraswati. Seeing her almost naked, Manakanaka felt desire for her and his seed fell in the sacred Saraswati. He took up his semen and placed it in a pot where it got divided into seven portions and from these seven portions were born the seven *rishis* who were the progenitors of the 49 Maruts. Later in life Rishi Manakanaka by his asceticism and penances came to be known in the three worlds. After he became famous, his hand got pierced with the blade of *Kusa ghas* and instead of blood, vegetable juice flowed from it. The Rishi, happy at this miracle danced with joy. Watching him dance, all the creatures stupified by his energy, also began to dance. When all creatures, mobile and immobile started dancing non-stop as if mesmerised, celestials with Brahma as their leader, approached Mahadeva and informed him of Manakanaka's great achievement and requested him to put a stop to this dancing. Siva Mahadeva then visited Manakanaka and addressed him: "O Brahman, why do you dance in this way, acquainted as you are with your duties? What is the occasion for such joy?" The Rishi answered. "Seeing vegetable juice flowing from my wound, I am dancing with joy." Siva laughed at him and said: "Behold me", and saying that struck his thumb with the end of his fingers and ashes white as snow came out of his wound. Seeing this happen, Manakanaka realised that he was Siva himself, the Great Supreme Being. Manakanaka requested Siva that his ascetic merit should not be destroyed for having displayed such a ridiculous behaviour. Mahadeva told him that the sacredness was in the *Kusa ghas* that was capable of turning blood into vegetable juice, and assured him that his asceticism will increase a thousand fold and he will always dwell in a *tirtha* called Sapta-Saraswat on the banks of river Saraswati which abounded with the trees of *Vadari, Ingudi, Kasmaryya, Plaksha, Aswattha,*

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. II, pp. 150-51.
[2]Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* p. 188; *Mahabharata,* vol. V, Salya Parva, pp. 379-82.

Vibhitika, Kakkola, Palasa, Karira, Pilu, Karushaka (cannot be identified botanically), *Bilva, Amrantaka, Atimukta, Kashandas* (cannot be identified botanically), *Parijata*: Baladeva, the elder brother of Krishna also visited this *tirtha.*

In the *Vishnu Purana* , *Kusa ghas* is considered as Vishnu or Hari. For all religious ceremonies, *Kusa ghas* is considered essential. When a person dies, his body is cremated and bones left unburnt as well as the ashes, are gathered and immersed in a river. A handful of *Kusa ghas* called *Kurcha* is brought and sprinkled on the floor where the dead body lay in the house with the chanting of a hymn which means: "The soul has departed from this house but may those who are left behind prosper and flourish and may their life be as green as this grass."

There is a mention of *Kusa ghas* in the cult of *Soma rasa.* The altar for the sacrifice was made of *Kusa ghas.* Confectioners who have to keep large quantities of cooked food during an eclipse, circumvent the taboo by keeping a few blades of *Kusa ghas* in their vessels when an eclipse is expected.[1]

There are rules of conduct for a man who has taken the vow of Brahmacharya.[2] Such a man it is said, "Be taking himself to the path of abstension, should seek to extinguish his dependence on both the external and internal sources. Sitting on *Kusa ghas,* with a *Kusa* in hand and binding his coronal locks with *Kusa,* he should surround himself with *Kusa* and have *Kusa* for robes...reciting the highly beneficial composition Gayatri, he should meditate with the aid of his intellect on Brahma alone."

The *Pavitra* meant for sprinkling clarified butter upon the sacrificial fire is made of the blades of *Kusa ghas.*[3] The diminutive *rishis* called Balakhilyas sprang from the blades of *Kusa ghas* spread out in a sacrifice. From the same blades of *Kusa* sprang Atri.[4] The sacred mythical island Kusa dvipa is named after a clump of *Kusa ghas* that grows there. The island is surrounded by the *ghrita* sea or the sea of butter.

[1]Gertrude J. Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend,* vol. II, p. 596; Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. II, p. 82; Dutt, *Agni Purana,* pp. 133-37.
[2]*Mahabharata,* vol. VIII, Karna Parva, p. 57.
[3]Ibid., vol. VII, Karna, Salya, Saupatika, and Stree Parvas, p. 184.
[4]*Mahabharata,* vol. VIII, Anusasana Parva, p. 139.

11

DIOSPYROS PEREGRINA (Gaertn.) Gurke

FAMILY EBENACEAE

Sanskrit : Tinduka
Hindi : Kalatendu
English : Ebony

According to Oriyan tribal tales as related by Verrier Elwin,[1] the origin of the tree goes back to antiquity. When Kittung and his wife had to escape the great deluge in a gourd, on reaching safety, they emerged from the gourd which naturally broke in the process and they made a fire from its fragments. From its charred wood arose the ebony tree which is black.

Another legend around the tree is about a girl who died from snake bite, and the tree arose from her grave. Since snake-bite turns the victim blue-black because of the poison, consequently the tree that arose from her grave is also black.

Some tribes of India fix a pole made of the ebony tree to protect fields of tobacco and chillies from a sorceror, in the belief that the sorceror would be attracted by the pole and since the pole is black, the whole field will appear black to the sorceror and thus made invisible, and protected from harm.

According to another tribal story,[2] the reason for the wood of *Tinduka* being black, goes back to the time of Ramachandra. Before the battle of Lanka took place, to rescue Sita, Hanuman, the monkey-god, was sent by Ramachandra to survey the formidable city of Lanka (see Cocculus cordifolius). Hanuman was captured and Ravana, the king of Lanka ordered that a piece of cloth should be tied to his tail, soaked with oil and lit, hoping thus to burn him alive. Contrary to Ravana's hopes, Hanuman with his tail burning, jumped from house top to house top, putting the city to flames. After he had jumped back to safety, he wiped his blackened hands on the ebony tree and its wood turned black.

According to a Muria tribal story which is very similar to the above story, when Lingo's virtue was tested by the ordeal of fire, a *Tinsa* tree grew out of the fire. Lingo's foot struck the *Tinsa* tree and the bark has since looked dead and dry on one side. Ashes from his body flew over the *Saja* tree and it became white and holy. Lingo becoming holy on

[1]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 127.
[2]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 129.

passing the test, rubbed his blackened body against the ebony tree and ever since its wood has been black.

Tinduka tree is considered sacred by the Buddhists as it figures in one of the Jataka stories,[1] the stories of Buddha's former births. When Brahmadatta was the king of Benares, Bodhisattva was born as a monkey. He, along with 80,000 other monkeys, lived near a village in the Himalayas. In the village was a tree of *Tinduka* which in season was loaded with sweet fruit. This village was inhabited for only a part of the year and the monkeys used to come down from the hills to eat the fruit when the villagers were away.

Once, when the tree was loaded with fruit, it so happened that the village was also full of people but even then the monkeys decided to risk and invade the tree. When they informed their master about their intentions, he warned them against it as men were very vengeful. But the monkeys were hungry for the taste of the delicious fruit and said: "We will go at mid-night when everyone is fast asleep." The great host of the monkeys came down from the mountains and waited in the vicinity of the village till villagers went off to sleep. When the village was all quiet, the monkeys invaded the *Tinduka* tree and started eating the fruit. But as ill-luck would have it, one man woke up and gave the alarm. The villagers woke up and came running with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on and surrounded the tree to kill the monkeys. The monkeys got scared and looked at their chief for help. He assured them that all will be well, and asked the monkeys to assemble together. When the monkeys had got together, they found that Senaka the nephew of the Master was missing. He had fallen asleep when the monkey troop had left for the village. On waking up, he followed the track of other monkeys and when he neared the village, he found people running about, shouting and brandishing sticks and realised that there was some danger to the monkeys. Just then he saw a hut outside the village where an old woman was fast asleep before a lighted fire. Taking the fire, Senaka set the village on fire. Seeing the village on fire, the villagers left the monkeys and the *Tinduka* tree, and started extinguishing the village fire. The monkeys left alone, ran away each carrying a fruit of *Tinduka* for Senaka.

In this story, the chief of the monkeys was Bodhisattva; his nephew Senaka was Mahanama Sakka and the monkey troop were the followers of Buddha.

Tinduka is a shade bearing tree and its wood is much valued. Different brands of the *Tinduka* wood are kept in the lying-in-chamber as it is believed by the tribals to keep the evil spirit away and bring luck.

[1]*Jataka Stories,* Tinduka Jataka, Book II, p. 53.

12

ELAEOCARPUS SPHAERICUS (Gaertn.) K. Schum. syn. Elaeocarpus ganitrus Roxb.

FAMILY ELAEOCARPACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Rudraksha
Hindi	:	Rudraksha
English	:	Utrasum Bead tree

Parvati, the daughter of Mena and Parvat, on getting married to Siva, the Lord of destruction and creation, discovered that he was oblivious to all feminine charm and indifferent to a woman's desire to adorn herself with ornaments.[1] Siva lived like a beggar or a *sadhu* practising austerities all the time. Parvati had undergone severe penance to win Siva as her husband but now that she was married to him, she like all women wanted to adorn herself with jewellery and look attractive. But to Siva these were unnecessary adornments. He did not see the worth of such earthly enjoyments, considering them superfluous and childish. The time he did not spend in practising austerities, he spent in a *samadhi*, which usually lasted for years on end..., a time he was oblivious even to the presence of his wife. Or else he gave her long discourses on learned topics which were too philosophical for her. Parvati's desire for jewellery was frustrated by Siva, year after year.

Himalayan peaks, the abode of Siva are blanketed with snow for the better part of the year. One year, when after an unusually prolonged winter, spring came, the chirping of birds could be heard from dawn to dusk; flowers opened in their myriad hues and garbs; the sky turned a heavenly blue; bees and butterflies skipped from flower to flower sucking nectar and joy was felt in every corner of the earth. Parvati was also filled with longing for jewels to adorn herself. She went to Siva and again asked for jewels, a desire he considered a mere frivolity, but Parvati was adamant. In the end Siva gave into her wishes. He stretched his hands and *Rudraksha* fruits fell from heaven into his hands by the dozens. He gave them to Parvati and asked her to make necklaces, bangles, armlets and earrings of the beads, saying that for the wife of an ascetic, they made the best jewellery. Parvati strung them and wore them as jewellery as directed by Siva.

[1]A well-known folklore told to me by Mrs Roda Chinoy, but could not be corroborated with any written text.

According to *Skanda Purana*, *Rudraksha* beads originated from tears that Siva shed when the Tripuras were destroyed. Tripuras were devotees of Siva but had become arrogant and started committing atrocities on mortals and celestials and had to be destroyed.[1]

There is a general belief that *Rudraksha* beads dispel the evil eye and if kept in the house, avert misfortune. Another belief is that they cure cardiac ailments if worn by people who have high blood pressure. Because of their association with Siva, *Rudraksha* beads are considered sacred by the followers of Siva, Rudra is the Vedic name of Siva, and *aksha*, means tears.

Garuda Purana mentions that 'for the *sandhya* adoration, sitting on *Kusa ghas*, one should wear a garland of beads made of either crystal, lotus, *Rudraksha* or *Putranjiva* beads.'[2]

According to *Agni Purana*,[3] god himself gave the method and types of *Rudraksha* beads to be worn. A man should wear *Rudraksha* beads, firmly threaded together and even in number. The beads should have a single mouth, or 3 or 5 mouths. Beads having 2, 4, 6 mouths with unbroken thorns on the surface, not having been eaten by worms or marked by any fissure are considered as the most auspicious. A four-mouthed bead should be worn by a person, either on his right arm, or tied to the tuft of hair on his crown. By doing so, the wearer even if not observing the vows of asceticism would acquire the merit of leading a pious life, or a man not observing the vow of religious ablutions, will be clean. The class of *Rudraksha* known as *Haimis*, should be worn by consecrating them with the Siva *mantra*.

Rudraksha beads are divided into four classes or *gocharas*: Siva, Sika, Yoti and Savitra. *Gochara* means a class of *Rudraksha*, a hundred thousand counting of which while reciting a *mantra*, grants success in life.

[1]Hazra, *Studies of the Upapuranas*, vol. II, pp. 325-26.
[2]Dutt, *Garuda Purana*, p. 134.
[3]Dutt, *Agni Purana*, vol. II, p. 1209.

13

EMBLICA OFFICINALIS Gaertn.
syn. Phyllanthus emblica Linn.
FAMILY EUPHORBIACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi : Dhatri, Dhatricha, Amalak, Amalaki, Anavala, Amla
English : Indian Gooseberry

Dhatricha or *Dhatri* means the earth or mother, particularly the nursing mother, perhaps because of its nourishing fruit. It is a tree that is associated both with Siva and Vishnu. The sacredness and association of the tree both to Lakshmi and Parvati is mentioned in the *Brihaddharma Purana.*[1] According to the legend, both the goddesses went to Prabhasa, a sacred place in Gujarat. Parvati said to Lakshmi that she wished to worship Vishnu by making a new offering. Lakshmi answered that she too wished to worship Siva through a new offering. At that the two goddesses wept and from their tears was created *Dhatri* or the *Amalaki* tree which both propitiated to worship Siva and Vishnu and since then the leaves of the tree are essential in the worship of Siva and Vishnu.

The tree is worshipped on *Sivaratri* day. Red and yellow thread is wrapped round it and flowers and fruits are offered to it just as in the worship of a deity. It is considered as one of the most sacred trees in Gujarat. In the month of *Kartik,* women worship the tree with flowers, sandal paste and vermilion, particularly on the ninth day of *Kartik* called *Akshaya-navami,* when women worship it for begetting male progeny. They make five circumambulations round the tree and tie sacred thread round its trunk each time.

Amalaki is a plant which transformed itself into a beautiful woman to entice Vishnu away from the charms of Vrinda (see Ocimum sanctum). The tree is very sacred to Hindus and credited with magical properties by the tribesmen. This plant of great medicinal value is planted on the south side of a temple or home.[2]

[1] *Brihaddharma Purana* as quoted in Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 128.
[2] Elwin, *Myths of Middle India,* p. 146.

14

ERYTHRINA VARIEGATA Linn.
syn. Erythrina indica Lam.
FAMILY PAPILIONACEAE; FABACEAE

Sanskrit : Mandara, Parijata
Hindi : Pharad
English : Coral tree

The sacredness of the tree is attributed to its origin from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned by the *devatas* and the *daityas* to procure ambrosia, i.e., *amrita,* the drink of immortality (see Nyctanthes arbortristis).

When the Ocean of Milk was churned by using mount Mandara as the churning stick and snake Vasuki as the churning rope, many objects made their appearance. Among them was the *Mandara* tree. Indra took the tree and planted it in his garden.[1]

Long ago Taraka *asura* was oppressing the *devatas* and men. They wanted Siva to produce a son who would be strong enough to kill Taraka and be the god of war.[2] Indra approached Brahma the Creator, and he in turn entreated Siva who consented to their request of his begetting a son on his wife, Uma. His game of love with Uma went on for centuries and since there appeared no end to this amorous play, the triple world trembled at the friction thus produced. Fearing lest the world perished, Brahma asked the gods to request Agni, the God of fire to stop Siva's amorous play. Agni afraid to interfere, fled and entered the waters, but the frogs getting scorched by the heat of Agni, told the gods of Agni's whereabouts. Agni cursed the frogs and made their speech inarticulate and again disappeared. This time he fled to Siva's paradise tree, *Mandara.* He was betrayed thereby the elephants and the parrots but the gods found him concealed in the trunk of the *Mandara* tree, hiding in the form of a snail. Thus caught, Agni agreed to oblige the gods. He approached Siva and by his heat stopped him from continuing with his amorous play with Uma and then told him about the wish of the gods. Siva agreed and dropped his semen into Agni, which was so large in quantity that even Agni, the God of Fire could not bear the heat, nor even Uma. Siva then asked Uma to worship Ganesha, the Lord who removes obstacles, so that a son could be born to them in Agni, and thus was born the six-faced Karttikeya, who, when he was only seven days old,

[1] Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* p. 67.
[2] Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. II, pp. 100-103.

killed the mighty *asura,* Taraka.

Mandara is one of the five trees growing in heaven and known as *Kalpavriksha,* the wish-fulfilling trees. *Mandara* tree originally grew in Vaikuntha, Indra's pleasure garden. Krishna stole the tree and brought it to earth while the gods were busy arguing among themselves over it. Rukmini and Satyabhama, the two wives of Krishna, quarrelled for the possession of its flowers. Since Satyabhama had already got the *Parijata* tree (see Nyctanthes arbortristis) from Indira's heaven for her garden, the *Mandara* tree was won by Rukmini. It adorned her garden and added pride to her mansion. From that time onwards, the tree is associated with Krishna.[1]

The wood of *Mandara* is held sacred and offered in the sacrificial fire, *homa.* Its flowers are offered to Siva as well as to Hanuman as he is considered a part of Siva. Krishna being an incarnation of Vishnu, the tree is also held sacred by his devotees. The plant is also considered a holy tree because of the trifoliate arrangement of its leaves which represents the holy trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. In Assam, its wood is considered sacred for cremations.

15

EUPHORBIA NERIIFOLIA Linn.

FAMILY EUPHORBIACEAE

Sankrit	:	Snuhi, Manasa tree, Manasasij
Hindi	:	Sehund

The tree *Snuhi* is associated with the worship of *nagas,* the serpents.[2] According to a legend, long, long ago, a wealthy merchant named Chand Saudagar lived in Champakanagar. He was a devout worshipper of Siva, and looked contemptuously on Manasa Devi, the snake goddess. Manasa Devi felt offended and to teach him a lesson, let loose her snakes in his large, well laid out garden and reduced it to a wilderness. Chand Saudagar by his devotion to Siva had acquired magical prowess and managed to reconvert the wilderness into a garden, a garden that he was very proud of. Manasa Devi assumed the form of a beautiful maiden and enchanted Chand Saudagar. He fell madly in love with her

[1]Cowen, *Flowering Trees and Shrubs of India,* p. 27; Thomas, *Epics, Myths and Legends of India,* p. 135; Blatter and Millard, *Some Beautiful Trees of India,* p. 68.

[2]Thomas, *Epics, Myths and Legends of India,* pp. 62-63.

and asked her to marry him. Manasa agreed but on the condition that he will transfer his magical powers to her. After the merchant had fulfilled this condition, Manasa assumed her natural form and asked him to worship her. Chand's love for the maiden was converted into fierce hatred of Manasa and he refused to worship her even at the cost of his beautiful garden being once again converted into a wilderness.

Manasa now tried her next trick to woo him as her devotee and bite his six sons to death. When Chand Saudagar was wailing over his dead sons, Manasa appeared before him and again asked him to worship her and she would restore them to life but the merchant refused her once again.

Time passed, Chand Saudagar set out on a long voyage and was returning home with his ships laden with rich merchandise. Manasa produced a terrible gale and all his ships were sunk. Chand himself was in danger of being drowned. Manasa offered to save him if he promised to worship her. But Chand preferred death to being her devotee. Manasa was adamant on taking her revenge and did not want him to die. She saved his life and cast him ashore to face privations and humiliations. But instead of relenting his attitude towards Manasa, his hatred of her increased with his miseries. After having undergone untold troubles, atlast he reached his native city. In course of time a son was born to him who was named Lakshmindra. On coming of age, Lakshmindra was betrothed to Behula, the beautiful daughter of Saha. But the astrologers predicted his death by snake bite on his nuptial bed. To frustrate Manasa's plans, Chand engaged a good architect to build a room of steel as the nupital chamber so that no snake could enter it. As the room was being built, Manasa appeared before the architect, intimidated him by threats and forced him to leave a slit which was disguised by a thin layer of metal.

On the wedding night, as Lakshmindra slept, with his bride Behula keeping watch, a snake crept into the nuptial chamber through the slit left open by the architect. Behula, who knew of the prediction, fed the snake with milk and kept it in good humour. But as the long hours of night slowly passed, she felt drowsy and ultimately fell off to sleep. The snake now got his opportunity and stung Lakshmindra to death. Behula woke up to see the snake crawl away after it had performed its tragic and cruel mission.

In the morning the corpse of Lakshmindra was put on a raft to let it drift down the river in the hope that it might revive, with the devoted Behula sitting besides the dead body of her husband. She refused to leave her husband's dead body inspite of persuasion by her relatives, saying that a wife's place was next to her husband.

The raft floated down stream, past villages and towns, days, weeks and months passed thus, and finally at the end of six months when the body had started to decay, the raft touched ground at a place where a woman was washing clothes. The little son of the woman was causing annoyance to his mother by interfering with her work. The mother strangled her son and quietly went on with her work. After she had finished with her washing, the woman sprinkled water on her dead son and recited a magic *mantra* and he was revived. Behula who had witnessed this miracle, requested the washer woman to bring Lakshmindra back to life. The washer woman had been sent on purpose by Manasa Devi and she took Behula to the snake goddess. When Behula approached Manasa Devi, she was told by her that Lakshmindra would be restored to life if she promised to convert her father-in-law and make him a devotee of Manasa. Behula agreed to this condition. Lakshmindra was restored to life and the husband and wife set out for their home. Chand Saudagar when informed of his son's miraculous recovery was very happy but did not like the condition for his recovery. However, he agreed to the condition though reluctantly. A man who could not be terrorised or intimidated by anything was forced ultimately to worship Manasa for the love of his son. Chand offered flowers of *Snuhi* to Manasa with his left hand and with his face turned away from the image, on the eleventh day of the waning moon, but for all that, Manasa, the goddess of snakes was appeased. She had won the final battle and her worship no one dared to oppose from that day onwards. Flowers of *Snuhi* came to be accepted as the offering most dear to Manasa and the plant came to be called *Manasasij,* the Manasa tree. The same story with slight variations appear in Maity's *Studies of Manasa Devi.*[1]

The plant of *Snuhi* has curative qualities especially against poison and because of this, perhaps it came to be associated with the goddess of snakes.[2] Women particularly in Bengal, plant the cuttings of the tree on *Dashara* day. It is worshipped during the rainy season and on other days of Manasa worship, as during the rainy season, the snakes come out of their holes.

The sacredness of the tree is traced back to the Indus valley civilisation. Followers of Manasa Devi believe that on the fifth day of the dark half of the moon in the month of *Sravana,* goddess Manasa appears on this tree, with eight serpents with their hoods spread. The plant is worshipped for the fulfilment of vows.[3] Since Manasa is associated with a fertility

[1]Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend,* vol. II, p. 67; Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasa,* pp. 39-107, 250, 264.

[2]Mathur, *Systematic Botany,* p. 189.

[3]Misra, *Bhavaprakasha,* p. 229, as quoted in Gupta, *The Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 49.

cult, and *Snuhi* tree is associated with her, it is worshipped by women for the blessings of a child.

The latex of the plant is acrid, rubefacient, purgative and an expectorant. It is used to remove warts and cutaneous eruptions, in ear-ache, asthma, and in ophthalmia.[1]

16

FICUS RELIGIOSA Linn.

Family Moraceae

Sanskrit	:	Aswattha
Hindi	:	Peepul, Bo tree, Bodhi tree
English	:	Indian Fig tree

For antiquity and veneration, the *Aswattha* is unrivalled throughout the world. The tree is mentioned from Vedic time onwards. It is mentioned in the *Bhagavadgita* as 'one that is not the same tomorrow', with reference perhaps to this world which is ever changing. There is a superstitious belief that the plant gives off oxygen at night. The sacredness of the *Aswattha* tree is mentioned in the *Mahabharata.*[2] "*Aswattha,* having its roots above and branches below is eternal. Its leaves are the *Chhandas.* He who knows it, knows the Vedas. Downwards and upwards are stretched its branches which are enlarged by the qualities; its sprouts are the objects of sense. Downwards, its roots leading to action are extended to this world of men." According to the footnotes given by Ganguli in his translation of *Mahabharata*: "Upwards and downwards mean from the highest to the lowest of created things. Enlarged by the qualities, i.e., the qualities appearing as the body, the senses etc. The sprouts are the objects of sense, being attached to the senses themselves as sprouts to enjoyments." Sacredness of *Aswattha* is due because its form cannot be known nor its beginning, end or support. "Cutting with the hard weapon of unconcern, this *Aswattha* of roots firmly fixed, one should seek for that place repairing wither one returns not again thinking, I will seek the protection of that primeval Sire from whom the ancient course of worldly life has flowed."

[1]*Wealth of India,* vol. III, p. 226.

[2]*Mahabharata,* vol. V, Bhishma Parva, pp. 94-95.

Hindus associate the tree with the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The tree is considered as a Brahman and worshipped daily after the morning bath. If an elderly member of the family dies, special offerings are made to it during the full thirteen days of mourning. If a boy dies during his thread ceremony, he is said to haunt the *Aswattha* tree.[1]

Aswattha is allegorical. Each tree is believed to arise from an unperceived root which is emblematical of the body, i.e., it springs from that head of the god. In the *Gita*, the tree typifies universe. This is perhaps because the figs of the tree are eaten by birds and the seeds pass unharmed through their alimentary canal and take root at most unimaginable places like the roof or walls of a house or in the bark of other trees, the roots remaining invisible. The leaves tremble in the breeze, making a characteristic fluttering sound.

The tree is believed to be Vishnu himself and at the same time, Vishnu is said to have been born under it and as a baby floats lying on a leaf of *Aswattha*. Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu died sitting under an *Aswattha* tree. This is the reason why the tree is never cut.[2] A ceremony called *Aswattha Pratishta* or the consecration of the *Aswattha* is performed to transfer the tree into a divinity by inducing Vishnu into it. Untold blessings will be showered on one who performs this ceremony. According to *Mahabharata*,[3] the man who worships *Aswattha* daily, worships the whole universe. Even though the tree is mainly associated with Vishnu, some consider Siva as the patron deity of the tree.

Brahmans worship the *Aswattha* tree daily during their evening prayer. They go to the tree and facing east repeat a prayer and sing hymns in praise of the tree which says: "O *Aswattha* tree! You are a God. You are a king among trees. Your roots represent Brahma the Creator, your trunk represents Siva the Destroyer, and your branches, Vishnu the Preserver. As such you are an emblem of the *Trimurti*. All who honour you in this world by performing *Upanayana*, walk round you, adoring you and singing your praise, obtain remission of their sins in this world and bliss in the next. I praise and adore you. Pardon my sins in this world and give me a place with the blessed after death. "The worshipper then walks round the tree 7, 14, 21, 28, 35 or more times but always in multiple of seven.[4]

Elwin writes that sometimes the roots of *Aswattha* represent Brahma, its bark represents Vishnu and its branches Mahadeva. According to the

[1]Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp. 150-51; Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, vol. II, pp. 652-53.
[2]Dubois, op. cit., pp. 652-53.
[3]*Mahabharata*, vol. X, Anusasana Parva, p. 268.
[4]Zenaide A. Ragozin, *Vedic India*, p. 29.

Muria tribe, the tree is not worshipped as it is considered to be an untouchable.

Aswatiha is regarded as a symbol of the male and ceremoniously married to a *Neem* tree which is symbolically, a female. In villages of India, usually these two trees are grown side by side with a platform built round them. On the platform intertwined or coiled snake stones are placed which are symbols of fertility. This symbolic association of sexes is reversed in Rajasthan and Punjab where the *Neem* tree is considered a male. Since women in *purdah* do not show their face to strange men, therefore, women in these areas cover their face with a veil while passing a *Neem* tree. In Orissa a marriage is performed between a *Vata* tree which is considered as the male and the *Aswattha* which is considered as the female.[1] The tree is frequently planted near a *Vata* tree so that their stems and foliage mix from a superstitious notion that they are of two different sexes and their growing together is regarded as marriage. The tree is invested with the triple cord like a Brahman and with the same attendant ceremonies as the thread ceremony of a Brahman. The *Aswattha* tree is also sometimes married to the *Kadali* tree, the two trees are grown so close together that their trunks intertwine and look like one.

Aswattha is considered sacred by some tribes of the Ganjam district of Orissa.[2] According to them, before the creation of the world, Kittung and his sister used to live in a gourd. When the gourd broke, the two started living on the Kurabeli hill. This was at a time when there were no trees on earth. When summer came, the sister complained of the intense heat. A squirrel bit off four fingers of the left hand of the Kittung while he was asleep at night, leaving only the third middle finger. On hearing his sister complain of the heat, the Kittung cut off his maimed left hand and put it on a stone which grew into the *Aswattha* tree called *Onjerneban* tree by the tribal people. The apex of the leaf is prolonged into a long projection which to the tribal people represents the middle finger of the Kittung's hand. The tribals make offerings to Ratusum in cups made of its leaves.

The sacredness of the *Aswattha* tree comes perhaps from the old Vedic ritual of kindling the sacrificial fire at religious ceremonies by friction between two peculiarly shaped pieces of wood, one of which is the *Aswattha*, and the ceremony is called, 'the birth of Agni.'[3] Vessels containing *Soma rasa* were made of the *Aswattha* wood. Till today, women worship the tree by circumambulating it, wrap, cotton yarn round its trunk and water its roots.

[1]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 129.
[2]Ibid., pp. 132-33.
[3]Ragozin, *Vedic India*, p. 159.

A story in the *Mahabharata* and *Vishnu Purana* mentions the importance of *Aswattha* in the ritual of kindling the sacred fire of *homa.*[1] Pururavas, son of Ila and Budha, saw the heavenly nymph Urvasi sporting with her friends and fell in love with her. She also desired him and both lived together happily for many years. Urvasi had to ultimately return to her heavenly abode as an *apsara* cannot live forever with a mortal. Pururavas became inconsolable and the *gandharvas* took pity on him. Since it was not possible for Urvasi to live with him on earth, *gandharvas* decided to include Pururavas among them. They gave him the divine fire and asked him to wish before it for permanent life with Urvasi and his wish would be granted. Pururavas left the fire in the forest and went for a bath. On his return he found the fire and the pan turned into the *Aswattha* and the *Sami* tree respectively. In fact, *Aswattha* was growing out of the *Sami* plant.

Having lost the fire, Pururavas could not wish for permanent life with Urvasi. So he asked the *gandharvas* again for the fire. They asked him to make the fire drill or *Arani* from the wood of the two trees into which the fire and the pan had been converted and with the fire thus produced, wish for a permanent life with Urvasi and the wish would be granted. Pururavas first made the fire drill with two twigs of the *Sami* plant but it was not the right type of fire. Then he took two twigs of *Aswattha* but still did not succeed. Ultimately, the drill was made by taking the wood of *Aswattha* for the upper part and the lower of *Sami* and the fire thus produced was the right type of fire and by wishing before it, he obtained his wish.[2] Symbolically, *Aswattha* was the male component and *Sami,* the female component. Since the fire was produced by friction between the *Aswattha* and the *Sami* plant in the sacred *homa* ceremony, the analogy between this and the intercourse of sexes is apparent, and Agni or fire thus produced is the child.

Agni once hid in the *Aswattha* tree and because of it being the temporary home of Agni, the God of Fire, the tree became sacred (see Prosopis cineraria).

The importance of sacrificial fires as initiatory rites to the final attainment of immortality has been accepted by Hindus since very early times. Their origin lies in the philosophy that the mere mortal must realise the necessity to strive after higher and finer values and not hanker after merely earthly passions. *Homa* is performed at practically all important sacred functions such as the investiture of the sacred thread, at the first hair cutting ceremony, marriage and *sraddha* ceremonies,

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. II, pp. 245-50; Arthur A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology,* p. 135.

[2]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. II, p. 355.

etc., when an offering of curds, ghee, rice, etc., are made to it.[1]

Apsaras are said to inhabit the sacred Fig trees in which their cymbols and lutes resound. Their favourite Fig trees are the *Nyagrodha, Aswattha, Udumbara,* and *Plaksha.*

In Bengal a ritual called *Aswatthapata vrata* is observed by women on the last day of the month of *Baisakh.*[2] Five leaves of *Aswattha* are required for this ritual and each leaf signifies a different stage of human life, a new leaf for the birth of a son, a young green leaf for beauty and youth, an old leaf for long life of the husband, a dry leaf for increase in happiness and wealth, a withered leaf for precious wealth beyond expectation. The plant is a symbol of fertility and is worshipped by women for the grant of a child.

Buddhists consider the tree sacred as prince Siddhartha sat in meditation under this tree and found enlightenment, wisdom. The tree since then is known as the *Bo* or the *Bodhi* tree and Siddhartha came to be known as the Buddha. A tree planted in Sri Lanka in 228 BC, is still alive.

A tree of *Aswattha* grows on the mythical Island Plakshadvipa. Gods sit under the *Aswattha* tree in the third heaven.[3] Krishna was sitting under an *Aswattha* tree when Jara shot him in the foot with an arrow.[4]

17

FICUS BENGHALENSIS Linn.

FAMILY MORACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Nyagrodha, Vata, Bahupada, Kalpavriksha
Hindi	:	Vata, Vad, Bargad, Ber
English	:	Banyan

Nyagrodha symbolises Siva and is, therefore, held sacred.[5] The tree is called the crested one. The ability of the tree to support its ever growing branches by the development of adventitious roots from its branches, roots which hang down and act as props over an ever widening circle, represents eternal life and that is why the tree is called *Bahupada,* one

[1]Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology,* p. 134.

[2]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 127.

[3]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. I, p. 44.

[4]Dikshitar, *Purana Index,* vol. I, p. 448.

[5]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. I, p. 44.

with many feet and is a symbol of long life, and associated with divinity. The tree is also a symbol of Brahma, worshipped on *Vad-Savitri* day, and on Saturdays of the month of *Jyeshtha* by women praying for the long life of their husbands. Often the tree is grown in close proximity with the *Neem* tree. The intertwined branches of the two trees, to the Hindus is holy union and is normally not cut down.

The Oriyan tribes consider it as the *Sadru* shrine of the gods and they think it sacrilege to cut it. The taboo against felling it is so great that if anyone cuts it in ignorance, he has to sacrifice a goat to the gods living on the tree. Special offerings are made to the gods of the tree at harvest time. At *Guar* and *Karya* ceremonies, cups are made of its leaves for pouring libations. The tribesmen consider the tree as mother for according to a legend, two orphans were left under it and they were nourished by milk (latex) dripping from the tree.

Nyagrodha tree in Hindu mythology is called *Kalpavriksha*[1] or the wish fulfilling tree, a tree that gives to the worshipper, food and drink, clothes and ornaments, gift of children and even beautiful maidens. This anthropomorphic worship of the tree is represented in a Buddhist sculpture from Besnagar. The tree has been depicted with long, pendant, adventitious roots and with untold wealth in the form of gold pieces in vessels placed under the tree. In *Mahabharata*,[2] *Jamvu* tree that grows south of the Nila and north of the Nishadha is a *Kalpavriksha* whereas in the *Bhagavata Purana, Kadamba* is the *Kalpavriksha*. Also sometimes the *Parijata* and the *Mandara* are considered as the wish-fulfilling trees.

The Pradhan tribes worship the tree because of the following reason.[3] When Jagrandha, the *guru* of the Pradhans died, his body was buried by his sons under a *Palasa* tree. The sons used to daily light a fire on the grave to keep away the wild animals from desecrating the grave. One day they found a *Nyagrodha* tree growing out of the grave. That night the eldest son of the *guru* had a dream in which his father asked him to look after the tree as it had grown out of their father's bones and brains. Pradhans consider the hanging roots of the tree as the matted, long hair of their *guru*.

There are three trees associated with the attainment of Omniscience by Buddha. Buddha sat for seven days under an *Aswattha* tree, the tree of Enlightenment, growing on the banks of river Nairanjana absorbed in the bliss of his enlightenment. Then he rose and sat under a *Nyagrodha* tree for seven days, absorbed in the bliss of his illumination. At the end of that period he sat in blissful calm under a third tree. The three trees

[1] Agarwala, *Matsya Purana: A Study* p. 188.
[2] *Mahabharata*, vol. V, Bhishma Parva, p. 19.
[3] Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, pp. 136-37.

are known as: The tree of Enlightenment, the tree of the Goatherd, the tree of the serpent king Muchalinda respectively. The last tree is so named because Muchalinda, the serpent king, protected Buddha with his hoods from a storm, as Buddha sat in meditation.

In *Vishnu Purana*,[1] the tree is compared to Vishnu. "As the wide spreading *Nyagrodha* tree is compressed in a small seed, so at the time of dissolution, the whole universe is compressed in thee as its germ. As the *Nyagrodha* germinates from the seed and becomes first a shoot and then rises into loftiness, so the created world proceeds from thee and expands into magnitude."

Nyagrodha planted in front of temples is tenanted by either Vishnu or Siva. The tree planted in public places like cross roads, village squares have lesser divinities such as *yaksha, kinnara*, or *gandharva*. It grows in Pushkar *dvipa*, a special abode of Brahma. The *dvipa* is surrounded by a sea of fresh water.[2] *Nyagrodha* is the *Bodhi* tree or the tree of Enlightenment of Kasyapa *muni*.[3] During the universal deluge at the end of an epoch, Narayana sleeps on a leaf of *Nyagrodha*.[4]

Its latex is applied in rheumatism and lumbago. An infusion of its bark is considered a tonic and astringent, used in diarrhoea, dysentery and diabetes.

18

FICUS KRISHNAE C.D.C.

FAMILY MORACEAE

English : Krishna's butter cup

The sacredness of this tree is due to its association with Krishna's childhood. A popular belief is that baby Krishna used to make a cup of its leaves to steal butter and curds and eat out of it. Since that time the trees put forth leaves which have their lamina joined at the base forming a shallow cup.

[1] Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, p. 79.
[2] Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship of India*, pp. 99-100.
[3] Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, p. 166.
[4] Dikshitar, *Purana Index*, vol, II, p. 286.

19

FICUS GLOMERATA Roxb.
syn. Ficus racemosa Linn.
FAMILY MORACEAE

Sanskrit : Udumbara
Hindi : Gular

The tree is sacred to Hindus and its wood is included in the *homa* ceremony. The roots of the plant are considered as Brahma, its bark as Vishnu and branches as Siva. The tree is compared to Vishnu. In fact one of the names of Vishnu is *Udumbara.* Its fruit is kept on the person to keep the evil eye away.[1] The seat of Vivaswan, a Vedic god worshipped at the end of the Soma sacrifice is made of it, as well as the throne of king Soma is carved out of its wood. The staff carried by a Vaisa at his thread ceremony is made of it. The reason why the tree seldom has any flowers is because on *Deepawali* night, gods gather on the tree and pluck all its blossoms.[2] *Atharvaveda* mentions that the sacrificial post and the sacrificial ladle is made of it. *Udumbara* is the *Bodhi* tree of Kanaka Muni. Dumariyan tribe worship the tree for the gift of a child.

A highly medicinal plant, its leaves are used in bilious affections; bark given to cattle in rinder-pest diseases; roots used in diarrhoea and diabetes; fruits considered stomachic and carminative; latex used in piles and diarrhoea.

20

HIPTAGE BENGHALENSIS Kurz
syn. Hiptage madablota Gaertn.
FAMILY MALPIGHIACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi : Madhavi lata
English : Hiptage

According to *Vishnu Purana,* Madhavi is the wife of Vishnu as Madhava, and the plant has been named after her. Symbolically, she, the mother

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship of India,* p. 15.
[2]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. I, p. 81.

of the earth, is the creeping vine and Vishnu is the tree round which she clings for support. *Madhavi lata* is a creeper with large, white, fragrant flowers and was known to the Hindus from very early times as seen from its frequent mention in ancient Indian literature. In flower symbolism it is compared to a frail young woman who clings for support to her lord and master, symbolised by the strong mango tree. There is a reference to it,[1] in Kalidasa's play *Sakuntala.* When Rishi Kanva discovered that his adopted daughter Sakuntala had met king Dushyanta, the man of her choice, he said to her that he had for long been looking for a handsome mango tree referring obviously to Dushyanta and that now he would give his *Madhavi lata,* i.e., Sakuntala to him in marriage.

Madhavi lata is a plant of great medicinal value, particularly useful for dermatitis. An application made out of it is highly beneficial in scabies. Its bark is aromatic; used in medicine to cure rheumatism and asthma.

21

IMPERATA ARUNDINACEAE Cyr.
syn. Imperata cylindrica Beauv.
FAMILY GRAMINEAE; POACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi : Munja ghas

The moon is considered a deity. According to *Skanda Purana,* he is the son of Atri and Anusuya, a Brahman and the king of priests. A popular belief is that he arose from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned by the *devatas* and the *daityas* to extract *amrita. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* makes him a Kshatriya and a prince.[2]

At first the moon was a very pious being and performed the *Rajasuya* sacrifice but later became arrogant and licentious. One day he saw Tara, the wife of Brihaspati, the teacher of gods and fell in love with her. He carried her off and inspite of repeated requests by Brihaspati, Soma refused to send her back. This led to a serious quarrel in which Ushanas supported by antigods, *danavas* and *daityas* sides with Soma; Indra, the lord of heaven, and most of the gods sides with Brihaspati. A fierce war ensued termed Tarakamaya. Soma was cut into two by Siva's trident.

[1]Sivaramamurti, *Sculpture Inspired by Kalidasa.*
[2]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* pp. 313-14; Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism,* p. 97; Dawson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology,* pp. 302-3.

The earth shaken by the fierce struggle, approached Brahma for protection and he promised to stop the war, and compelled Soma, the moon to send Tara back to her husband. Tara by that time was pregnant. Brihaspati, her husband ordered her to get rid of her pregnancy. Tara gave birth to a son of great beauty whom she deposited in a clump of *Munja ghas*. Both Soma and Brihaspati were fascinated by the beauty and radiance of the child and claimed him as theirs. Tara was ashamed to admit the paternity of the child and kept quiet. At this the child was incensed and said, "Unless you tell who is my father, I will sentence you to such a fate that it will deter every female in future from hesitating to speak the truth." Brahma appeased the anger of the child and then asked Tara to tell who was the father of the child. Tara blushingly admitted that Soma was the father of Budha. Soma, the Lord of constellations embraced his son and called him wise. The child was named Budha, the wise, and became the planet mercury. Since Budha, the son of Soma was deposited at birth in a clump of *Munja ghas,* the plant became sacred.[1]

The sacred thread of Brahmans is made of the *Munja ghas. Munja ghas* has great commercial value.

22

ISCHAEMUM AUGUSTIFOLIUM Hack.

syn. Eulaliopsis binata (Retz.) C.E. Hubbard

FAMILY GRAMINEAE; POACEAE

Hindi : Sabai ghas

A Birhor tribal legend[2] gives the myth of the origin of the *Sabai ghas.* Some men murdered their only sister but she came back to life and forgave them. The brothers felt ashamed of themselves and asked mother earth to take them back in her fold as they could not face their sister. The earth obliged and swallowed them, probably an earthquake occurred. The sister tried to save them by catching hold of their hair which alone remained above the earth. The hair later turned into *Sabai ghas.*

Gadaba tribal legend is similar to the above story with regard to the brother and sister relationship. In this story, it is the fear of the curse

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. VII, p. 26.
[2]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India,* pp. 131-32.

attached to incest which caused the tragedy and it is the sister who goes under the earth as she is ashamed of her intimate relations with her brother. As the sister is being engulfed by the earth, the brother tries to rescue her but manages to catch only her hair before the earth closes and the sister is trapped under it. Her hair which remained above the surface turned into *Sabai ghas.*

23

MANGIFERA INDICA Linn.

FAMILY ANACARDIACEAE

Sanskrit : Amra
Hindi : Aaam, Chuta, Kakkola
English : Mango

Mango tree is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists. Lord Buddha was once presented with a grove of mango trees under which he used to rest and since then the Buddhists consider the tree holy. According to a Burmese legend, a gardener presented Buddha with a large mango fruit. The fruit was cut and got ready for Buddha to eat by his favourite disciple Ananda. Afterwards Buddha handed the stone of the fruit to Ananda to plant in a suitable place. When Ananda had planted the stone as directed, Buddha washed his hands over it and suddenly a beautiful white mango tree sprang from it, bearing flowers and fruits. This story is represented in a sculpture at Bharhut.

Hindus consider the tree of great religious significance. Symbolically it is Prajapati, Lord of the Creation. Therefore, on all religious occasions, Hindus use its twigs as tooth brushes and its leaves as spoons for pouring libations.[1] A long iron nail is hammered through a mango into the foundations of a building to protect it from harm.

Villagers in India believe that the mango tree puts forth fresh leaves at the birth of a son. Mango leaves are festooned across the doorways of a house where a son is born. The plant being auspicious, its leaves are also hung over the doorway of a house where the marriage is performed, perhaps in the hope that the young married couple will beget a son.

The origin of the tree is seeped in mythology. The daughter of Surya, the Sun-god, was being pursued by an enchantress. To escape her, the

[1]Cowen, *Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India,* pp. 35-36.

girl threw herself into a pond and turned into a lotus flower. A king saw the flower and wished to possess it. But before he could take possession of it, the enchantress burnt it, and from the ashes of the lotus flower, arose the mango tree. The king saw the tree full of mango fruit, and desired it. When the fruit ripened, from it arose the daughter of Surya whom the king recognised as having been his wife in an earlier birth.

In aboriginal India, the bride and the bridegroom have to circumambulate a tree before the marriage ceremony is performed. The bride smears the *Mahua* tree with vermilion, walks round it and embraces it. The bridegroom performs a similar ceremony with the mango tree.

According to an Oriyan tale, the tree was created by Kittung from the thigh bone left behind accidentally by the worshipper. The tree is also associated with Kinchesum, a god accepting human sacrifice. It is a favourite tree for committing suicide by hanging.[1] The Gadaba and Kond tribes associate the mango fruit with human testicles as they find a resemblance between the two. According to a Bonda story, death came to the world through the mango fruit. Gadaba and Bondo mourners at a funeral have to step over the bark of the mango tree before they can return home. Gadabas also use mango branches in a prophylactic rite to avert disease from a village. Practically all over India a mango fruit festival is observed, before that it is taboo to eat the fruit.

The wood of the tree is included in the funeral pyre and in the sacrificial fire *homa.* Flowers of mango are dedicated to the moon and offered to him on the second day of *Magh* as well as to Madan, the god of love.

The mango tree in *Brahmasaras* is in the shape of Brahma. He who waters it, leads his *Pitris,* ancestors to salvation.[2]

During his separation from Parvati, Siva sat under an *Amra* tree and was united to Parvati through the grace of Lalita.[3]

[1]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa,* p. 136.
[2]Dikshiar, *Purana Index,* vol. I, p. 166.
[3]Ibid., pp. 278-79.

24

MONSTERA DELICIOSA Liebm.

FAMILY ARACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi	:	Amarphal
English	:	The immortal fruit

Amarphal is the fruit of a creeper which bears very unusual fruits. The fruit is approximately 500 mm long and 100 mm in circumference and ripens slowly from August to October. Its upper portion resembles a pine cone and its skin is edible and falls down by itself. But the rest of the fruit continues to grow and ripen for a very long time. As the fruit continues to ripen after it has been cut from the creeper, it is called immortal or *Amarphal.* The fruit is edible.

According to a story,[1] the fruit revolutionised the life of Raja Bhartrihari of ancient India. An ascetic gave the fruit to the Raja. The Raja decided to present the fruit to his wife Bhanumati. Unknown to the king, the queen had a lover and she in turn presented the fruit to him. But her lover was not faithful to the queen and gave the fruit to a prostitute. Since the king was considered as the earthly representative of god, the prostitute felt that only a king deserved such a rare treat and gave the fruit to him. On receiving back the fruit which he had presented to his queen, the king got a rude shock on realising his wife's infidelity to him. He decided to leave her and the kingdom and became an ascetic.

The description of a plant bearing a cone like fruit tallies with that of Monstera deliciosa. May be this plant came to India long after the story of Raja Bhartrihari. Being a plant that came from outside India and not being indigenous to India it does not have a local name. According to one version, the fruit was an unusual mango fruit.[2]

[1]Helmuth V. Glassenapp, *Indische Liebeslyrik,* p. 222.
[2]Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia,* pp. 125-26.

25

MUSA PARADISIACA Linn.
syn. Musa sapientum Linn.
FAMILY MUSACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Rambha, Kadali
Hindi	:	Kela
English	:	Plantain, Banana

A salutation to Vishnu is as follows: 'As the bark and leaves of the *Kadali* plant is to be seen in its stem, so thou art the stem of the universe and all things are visible in thee.[1] *Kadali* plants are auspicious for Hindus especially for Vaishnavites and Saivites as the plant is considered to be an incarnation both of Parvati, the wife of Siva and of Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. Plantain plant is used for various religious ceremonies. Entire plants are fixed at the entrance gate of houses of marriage or to decorate the *pandal* as it symbolises fertility and plenty. The *Kadali* fruit is offered at temples. The plant is worshipped in the month of *Kartik* by women desiring male progeny. It is also a symbol of fecundity and the bride is given the plantain fruit hoping she will bear male progeny. The image of goddess Nanda Devi is carved out of its trunk. The plantain deity identified with Lakshmi and Parvati is an agricultural deity called *Navapatrika.* A life sized statue of the goddess is carved out of the plant and dressed like a bride with *Bilva* fruit for her breasts, supported by a piece of sugarcane. The leaves of sugarcane plant are twisted like a bow and represents the head and hair of the deity. *Kachu, Haridra, Jayanti, Dadima, Asoka, Dhanya,* represent the different parts of her body. This *Navapatrika* is worshipped as Lakshmi. She is placed in front of a *Bilva* tree and worshipped invoking Durga. *Navapatrika* or the nine plants collectively are a symbol of Durga, sometimes also associated with the Sun-god. This image is mainly worshipped by women for the gift of a husband, a child or for a prosperous life.

According to an Oriyan tribal story the plant was the creation of Bimma. As the plant bore nourishing fruit and every part of it was useful, Ramma became jealous of Bimma's creation and cursed it to die after producing only one bunch of flowers. But this in reality is not true. Plantain plant is perennial and produces flowers and fruits season after season. Its fruits are offered by tribes of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh to

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India*, pp. 13, 110-11.

gods Kittungsum and Mardisum and also used in their religious and marriage ceremonies.

Gadaba tribes believe that the Plantain plant bears fruit without pollination and fertilisation of its flowers because of the following reason. Long ago, there were five sisters called Mango, Tamarind, Fig, *Jamun*, and Plantain. When the sisters came of age, their father was worried about finding them suitable husbands. To ascertain their wishes, he called them one day. Except for Plantain, the other four sisters wanted husbands and many children. When Plantain was asked what she desired, she answered: 'I certainly want children but not a husband. And I also want to get old soon and not have to wait for a long time.'

In course of time, Mango, Tamarind, Fig, and *Jamun* got married and bore so many children that their husbands ran away in sheer fright. These girls in the next life were born as trees and bore many fruits which symbolically are the children they had in their previous life. Plantain did not marry but produced children and grew old.[1] Plantain plant bears fruits parthenogenetically, i.e., without fertilisation and the fruits do not have seeds.

A popular story from *Mahabharata* is that before the outbreak of war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Krishna went as a mediator. The Pandavas did not want war but their cousins, the Kauravas were adamant on it and would not listen to Krishna's advise even after he had predicted the destruction of the entire race. Defeated in his mission, Krishna visited Vidura, a half brother to both Pandu and Dhritarashtra. Vidura was not at home. Viduri, his wife offered Krishna the *Kadali* fruit. She was so enraptured by Krishna having come to her house that absent-mindedly, she threw away the fruit and offered only the peels of the fruit to Krishna. Krishna noticed it but kept on eating the peels as they were offered to him with a pure heart and with unflinching devotion.

[1]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 140-41.

26

NELUMBO NUCIFERA Gaertn.
syn. Nelumbium speciosum Willd.
FAMILY NYMPHAEACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Pundarika
Hindi	:	Padma, Kamala, Kumuda
English	:	Lotus

Lotus is a symbol of eternity, plenty and good fortune and this symbol frequently occurs in Hindu and Buddhist art and literature.

In Hindu mythology, lotus is associated with Brahma, the demiurge Creator and the pristine embodiment of the universal spirit who was born of the lotus. A stalk of lotus arose from the navel of Vishnu as he lay reposing on his serpent couch, Ananta, in the celestial waters under a starless sky. This lotus which bore Brahma, is considered as a duplicate manifestation of Goddess Padma herself.

From the earliest Vedic times, water has been regarded in India as a manifestation of the divine essence and that is why oceans and rivers figure so frequently in Hindu mythology. *Pundarika* or lotus which grows in the water considered as the primeval waters of the spirit or the life maintaining element. Whereas Vishnu is the chief procreator of the universe, his wife Padma (lotus) is second only to him. She is also called Sri or Lakshmi, i.e., Prosperity, Fertility and Beauty. For this reason the Hindu kings apart from being married to their earthly queens are also married to Sri Lakshmi or Raj Lakshmi who is considered as the very incarnation of good luck and fortune. If Raj Lakshmi forsakes a king, there is a danger of his losing his kingdom.

In a hymn in a small supplement of late verses appended to the *Rig-veda*, the lotus goddess Sri or Lakshmi is praised as *Padmasambhava*, lotus born *Padmesthita*, standing on a lotus; *Padmavarna*, lotus coloured; *Padmauru*, lotus thighed; *Padmakshi*, lotus eyed; *Padmini* or *Pushkarini*, abounding in lotuses; *Padmamalini*, wearing lotus garlands; *Madhavi*, honey like; Hiranyamayi, made of gold; *Vishnu-patni*, wife of Vishnu.[1]

The lotus unfolds the universe. According to *Gopala-uttaratapini Upanishad*,[2] "The immaculate lotus rising from the depth of the water and even remote from the shores is associated with the notion of purity

[1]I. Scheftlowitz, *Die Apokryphen des Rgveda*, as quoted by Zimmer; *The Art of Indian Asia*, vol. I, p. 159.

[2]Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, p. 156.

and with the cohesive tendency (*sattva*) from which spring the law-of-conduct (*dharama*) and knowledge (*jnana*). It is sometimes taken as the emblem of the six transcendent powers (*bhaga*) which characterise divinity (*bhagavan*)."

Goddess Padma does not figure in the early Vedas because like the lotus plant, she is also a product of India and only when the Aryan invaders came to India, did Goddess Padma make her appearance in Vedic hymns. *Pundarika* is the creation of the divine life substance and that is why the celestial waters produce a thousand petalled lotus of pure gold before the universe is created. This lotus opens to give birth to the demiurge Creator Brahma who then creates the universe. Waters are considered female and the cosmic lotus is the womb from which issues Brahma who creates the earth.

Earlier Goddess Padma was worshipped as the mother but with the Aryan invasion of India and the installation of their patriarchal gods, she was relegated to a servile position and is depicted as pressing the feet of her Lord Vishnu, and Brahma the Creator was installed on her lotus throne. But with the merging of the Vedic and the earlier traditions, she was reinstated in her position of honour. Even among the Buddhists, Padmapani or Avalokitesvara, like Vishnu, has divine powers.

Very often the lotus goddess is depicted not in a human form but by her symbols, a stalk of lotus or the lotus pedestal, the *Padmasana*. Sometimes her symbols are consigned to other deities. Quoting Zimmer[1] "the lotus symbol, which originally gave birth to beings and existences in unending successions, now carries the powerful wisdom of *Nirvana*: the word that puts an end to all individualised existence, whether in heaven or on earth."

The *Pancavimsa Brahmana*[2] states that the lotus flower is born of the light of *nakshatras*, and the *Atharvaveda* compares the human heart to the lotus.

According to the *Bhagavata Purana*,[3] Gokul is compared to the thousand petalled lotus with Govinda sitting on its central disc. The petals are the seats of different forms of Sri Krishna and of different occult centres. The southern petal is the occult seat attainable with difficulty by ascetics. The south-eastern petal contains two recesses. The eastern petal has purifying properties. The north-eastern petal is where one attains ones aspirations, and *gopis* attained Krishna on this petal by worshipping Katyayani, also Krishna hid the clothes of the *gopis* on this petal. The northern petal of the lotus is the seat of the twelve Adityas

[1]Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, p. 100; idem, *The Art of Indian Asia*, vol. I, p. 159.

[2]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, vol. II, p. 536.

[3]Sinha, *A Study of the Bhagavata Purana*, p. 451.

and is considered as good as the disc itself. The north-east petal is the seat of Kaliya. Respect and favour were shown to the wives of Vedic *rishis* on the western petal, also Agha *asura* was killed here. The lake of Brahma is also present on it. *Asuras* Vyoman and Santhacinda were killed on the south-west petal.

Eight petals are situated in Brindavana. Outside Brindavana on its periphery are present sixteen petals. The first petal is the seat of Goverdhana where Krishna was installed as Govinda, and contains *Madhu vana*, the second *Khadira vana*, the fourth *Kadamba*, fifth *Nadisvana*, or the residence of Nanda, the sixth *Nanda*, seventh *Vakula*, eighth *Tala vana* where *asura* Dhenuka was killed; ninth *Kumuda*, the tenth *Kamya* where Brahma knew Krishna as Vishnu; the eleventh has many forests of different types of plants; the twelfth a forest of *Bhandira*, thirteenth, a forest of *Bhadra*, fourteenth of Shri; fifteenth *Lohar*, sixteenth *Mahavana*. Deeds of Bal-Krishna upto the age of five took place at *Mahavana*.

Kamalasana, the lotus seat or as a support for feet is one of the favourite themes in literature and sculpture.[1] Brahman is seated on the lotus arising from the navel of Vishnu. Saraswati has a white lotus as her seat, the *Svetapadmasana* while Lakshmi is depicted as sitting on a red lotus. Her home is the lotus pond. In fact, in India, practically every deity is represented on a lotus seat. The whole world, in fact, is conceived as a huge lotus.

Lotus, like *Sami* and *Mandara* owe their sacredness to the fact that a deity once resided in the plant as is borne out by the following story.[2]

Rishi Dadhichi of Bhrigu's race was approached by the deities with Indra at their head, to discard his earthly body, so that a deadly weapon could be made from his bones with the help of which their enemies could be killed. Dadhichi by his yogic powers, cast off his body. Dhatri, taking the bones of the Brahman, created a weapon called the thunderbolt with the help of which Indra struck Viswarupa, son of Twastri. Having killed him, Indra severed the head from the body. From the energy still residing in the lifeless body of Viswarupa, was born a mighty *asura* called Vritra. Vritra, an enemy of Indra, was also killed by the latter. In consequence of this double sin of Brahmanicide, Indra was greatly frightened and had to abandon the sovereignty of heaven. By his yogic attributes of *anima*, i.e., superhuman powers by which one could become minute, he became small enough to enter the stalk of a lotus growing in the Manasa lake. When the Lord of the three worlds thus hid himself, the attributes of *Rajas* and *Tamas* assailed the deities; *mantras* chanted by *rishis* lost all efficacy, and people became an easy prey to *rakshasas*. The deities and

[1]Sivaramamurti, *Sanskrit Literature and Art, Mirrors of Indian Culture*, p. 85.
[2]*Mahabharata*, vol. IX, Santi Parva, p. 579.

the *rishis* decided to crown Nahusha as king of the three worlds and law and order was restored once again. After a while, Nahusha thought that since he enjoyed all that once belonged to Indra, he had a right on his wife Indrani also. He visited Sachi, i.e., Indrani and asked her to be his wife, saying, "The position of Indra is now being occupied by me. I deserve to enjoy his dominion and all the precious possessions of Indra. You belonged to Indra and, therefore, you should be mine." Sachi did not wish to be Nahusha's wife and gave him a false promise of meeting him on a particular day.[1] After that she proceeded to Brihaspati to find her husband's whereabouts. Brihaspati asked her to invoke the boon giving goddess, Upasruti. Invoked by Sachi, Upasruti appeared before her and conducted her to lake Manasa and pointed out Indra residing within a lotus stalk. Seeing Sachi looking pale and emanciated, Indra became anxious and asked her the cause of it. Sachi told him of Nahusha's desire to make her his wife. Indra instructed her and said: "Go and say to Nahusha that he should come on a vehicle never used before and to which *rishis* are harnessed." Sachi left with a joyous heart and Indra re-entered the lotus stalk. Seeing Sachi come back to heaven, Nahusha was happy and agreed to the terms of Sachi and harnessing a few *rishis* to the vehicle, he set out to meet her. Agastya *muni* did not approve of the disrespect shown to the *rishis* and objected to it. Nahusha insulted him further by kicking him with his foot. At that Agastya was infuriated and cursed him to fall to earth as a snake. With the fall of Nahusha, the three worlds were again without a king and chaos reigned. The deities and the *rishis* gathered and requested Vishnu to remove the curse of Brahmanicide from Indra. Vishnu agreed provided Indra performed the horse sacrifice. Led by Sachi, the deities proceeded to Manasa lake and brought Indra back with them. The plant became sacred because Indra resided in it for a while.

Lotus is also held sacred because of Vishnu who used to offer one thousand lotus buds daily in worship to Siva. One day he found that one bud was missing when he went for his daily prayers. Since his eyes were always compared to lotus buds, he took out one eye and substituted it for the missing lotus bud (see Aegle marmelos).

The rootstock of the lotus called *Padmaka* or *Padmakashtha* goes into the composition of many drugs. The seeds and stalks of the plant are edible. Rhizomes yield a nutritious arrowroot, given to children in diarrhoea and dysentery. Carpels are demulcent and nutritive.

An offering of lotus stalks at temples is highly auspicious. *Pundarika* or the white lotus is the *Bodhi* plant, the plant of enlightenment of Rishi Sikhi.

[1]Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 130.

27

NICOTIANA TABACCUM Linn.

FAMILY SOLANACEAE

Hindi : Tambaku
English : Tobacco

The tobacco plant of commercial importance was introduced into India as late as the fifteenth century AD by the Portuguese and is perhaps why, there are no Hindu myths connected with the plant, nor it is considered sacred by them. But a large number of tribal myths connected with the plant are current, though very likely they refer to the wild varieties of the plant.[1]

With slight variation, all the stories appear to be based on the same legend. There was a king who had an ugly daughter whom no one would marry inspite of temptations of wealth offered by the king. The girl grew in years and when she realised that she would have to remain unmarried all her life, she killed herself in desperation. At the time of her death, she was given a boon by the god that in whatever form she came back to earth, she would be loved and desired by men. After her death, her body was cremated and from her ashes grew the tobacco plant.

Another story concerning the tobacco plant relates to poverty. There was a very poor family who could not afford the traditional hospitality. The family killed itself rather than feel embarrassed before their guests. At their death, gods felt sorry for the poor people and promised to give them something inexpensive so that in future they did not feel the humiliation of having nothing to offer their guests. And thus were created the tobacco, the betel and the areca nut plants, all inexpensive which the poor in India offer to their guests (see Piper betle).

Another story relates to Mahadeva.[2] Mahadeva was slightly mad from the day of his birth. Soon after he married Parvati, he came home very hungry and asked for food and Parvati was late in getting his dinner. When he kept on asking for food, Parvati thought that he wished to have sex with her and kept on smiling at him. In this way ten years passed. Ganesa was born but Mahadeva still did not change. He kept on asking for food and Parvati got weary of him. When she could bear his persistent demands for food no longer, she went to the forest and picking up a leaf, prayed to Vanaspati, the lord of vegetation and asked

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 324; idem, *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, p. 64.
[2]Elwin, *The Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 177-78.

him to make her husband love her. She came home, rolled one leaf into a pipe, powdered another leaf and filled the pipe with it and left the pipe near the food she was cooking. When Mahadeva came home and asked for food, she put a little fire into the pipe and gave it to him. Mahadeva began to smoke and soon forgot about the food and Parvati could cook the food in her own time. Parvati then grew the plant of tobacco in her garden so that Mahadeva could have his pipe daily.

28

NYCTANTHES ARBOR-TRISTIS Linn.

FAMILY OLEACEAE

Sanskrit : Parijata
Hindi : Harshingar
English : Tree of sorrow, Night Jasmine

The origin of the tree goes back to the churning of the Ocean of Milk. When Vishnu, as Hari, the Preserver of the universe was approached by *devatas* for protection from affliction, desires, troubles and grief, he assured them of renewed energy to fight evil and said, 'Let the gods in association with the *asuras* cast medicinal herbs into the sea of milk, take the serpent Vasuki for the churning rope, mount Mandara as the churning stick and churn the ocean for *amrita*, the drink of immortality from the agitated ocean. The *devatas* in alliance with the *asuras* started churning the ocean. Vishnu became a tortoise on whose back the stick was pivoted.[1]

From the ocean thus churned, first arose Surabhi, the celestial cow as a mountain of milk and curds; then appeared Varuni, the goddess of wine with her eyes rolling with intoxication. Next arose the celestial *Parijata* tree perfuming the universe with its blossoms followed by a troupe of *apsaras*, the heavenly nymphs. Then came the cool-eyed moon which was seized by Mahadeva and adorns his head, followed by poison which would have endangered the sea but was taken by the *nagas*, the serpents. The lord of medicine, Dhanwantri, robed in white and holding in his hand, the cup of ambrosia, arose out of the ocean.

[1]Ragozin, *Vedic India*, pp. 187-90; Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, pp 64-67; Mackenzie, *Indian Myths and Legends*, pp. 142-44; Agarwala, *Matsya Purana: A Study*, p. 337; Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, vol. 1, pp. 117, 232.

Goddess Sri looking resplendent with her beauty and sitting on a lotus flower, arose next.

The story of the churning of the ocean appears with slight variations in several Puranas. The *Parijata* tree of the *Matsya Purana* list,[1] of articles which arose from the churning of the milky ocean is considered as a *Kalpavriksha,* the heavenly tree which symbolises mind. It remains with one from birth and one gets whatever one desires, by wishing under its shade.

Parijata tree which arose from the Ocean of Milk was taken by Indra and planted in his pleasure garden. Andhaka *asura,* son of Kasyapa and Diti tried to carry it away and was slain by Siva. According to the *Bhagavata Purana,* Krishna took away the *Parijata* tree from Indra's garden after subduing the gods. He was incited to do so by his wife Satyabhama who desired the tree: *Harivamsa* mentions that Satyabhama was upset at Narada *muni* presenting the flowers of this tree to Rukmini, the chief queen of Krishna and decided to possess the tree itself, and paid a visit to Vaikuntha.[2]

With the assent of Aditi, Indra conducted Satyabhama to the pleasure gardens of gods where the *Parijata* tree was growing. The tree was a favourite of Sachi, the queen of Indra. It had a bark of golden colour, and young leaves of copper-colour, and it bore clusters of small fragrant flowers. One seeing such a beautiful tree, Satyabhama taunted her husband Govinda saying: "You have always said that I was your favourite queen. Why not then transfer this divine tree to Dwaraka where it would be an ornament in my mansion. I will shine among the other queens with the flowers of it in the braid of my hair.

When Satyabhama approached Krishna with her request, he took the *Parijata* tree and put it upon his Garuda to take it away. The keepers of the garden remonstrated with him saying that the tree belonged to Sachi and he could not take it away. For provoking the wrath of Indra, Krishna would be punished.

Satyabhama was enraged at this and answered, "What right has Sachi and Indra to the *Parijata* tree. As it was produced by the churning of the Ocean of Milk, it is the common property of all. Sachi, confident of her husband's strength has kept it to herself. I will not submit to her. Let Indra prevent my husband from taking it away."

Indra, taking an army of celestials, marched to the defence of the *Parijata* tree. The battle raged for long, myriad darts and missiles were spread far and wide. The air reverberated with the sound of shells and shaft; the arrows were scattered over great distances like fleece from the

[1]Agarwala, *Matsya Purana: A Study,* p. 340.
[2]Dutt, *Agni Purana,* p. 55

pods of the *Salmali* tree. Ultimately, Krishna's discus *Sudarsana* cut Indra's thunderbolt to pieces. Seeing Indra retreat, Satyabhama taunted him, "King of the triple world, it ill becomes the husband of Sachi to run away. Adorned with garlands of *Parijata* flowers, Sachi comes to you. Of what use is the sovereignty of heaven with the *Parijata* tree no longer there? And how will you now face Sachi? No, don't run away. You must not suffer shame. Here, take the *Parijata* tree, let not the *devatas* get annoyed. I do not want the *Parijata* tree."

Indra replied, "I am not ashamed of being defeated by him who is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the world." On hearing this, Krishna told Indra that he did not want to take the tree and it could remain in Indra's garden. But Indra was adamant on Krishna taking it and said: "Let this *Parijata* tree be transferred to Dwaraka and it will stay there as long as you remain in the world of mortals."

The tree was then transported to Dwaraka where it was planted in Satyabhama's garden. The fragrance of its flowers perfumed the earth for three furlongs and it is said that anyone who beheld the tree could recollect events of his prior existence.[1]

The name 'Tree of Sorrow' or 'arbor-tristis' refers to the night flowering habit of the plant. The name is connected with the following story.[2] There was once a princess who fell in love with Surya-*deva,* the resplendent, handsome Sun-god. He sported with her for a while and then deserted her. The princess was heart-broken. In despair she killed herself and her body was cremated. From her ashes arose the 'tree of sorrow'. Since Surya was the cause of death of the princess, the tree is unable to bear the sight of the Sun and in its natural habitat is found in deep forests. It blossoms at night and with the first ray of dawn, its orange centered white flowers drop.

The flowers are usually offered to the *devatas* of the forest for favouring the *shikari* in his kill. They are also used in garlands and are placed on biers.

Its leaves are antibilious and expectorant, used in rheumatism and fevers; decoction given in sciatica, are laxative, diaphoretic, diuretic and antithelmintic. Powdered seeds are used for scurfy affections of the scalp.

[1]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana,* pp. 66, 462, 482.
[2]Cowen, *Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India,* p. 122.

29

OCIMUM SANCTUM Linn.

FAMILY LABIATAE; LAMIACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Tulasi
Hindi	:	Tulsi
English	:	Sacred Basil

Tulasi-tulana-ataeva tulasi, i.e., nothing can equal the virtues of *Tulasi* is a common saying. Tulasi is the meeting point of heaven and earth.[1]

According to a legend, *Tulasi* plant arose from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned for *amrita* (see Nyctanthes arbor-tristis).[2] Another legend regarding its origin is as follows.[3] *Tulasi* was married to Jalandhar who was born of the sweat of Mahadeva that fell in the sea (Jala is water). Because of his severe austerities and penance he had been blessed by Vishnu and made invincible to man, gods and demons so long as his wife remained faithful to him. *Tulasi* or Vrinda the name by which she was known as the wife of Jalandhar, was known for her conjugal fidelity. Getting arrogant of his invincible state, Jalandhar started committing atrocities on men. A time came when his excesses against humanity went beyond endurance. For a redress of their grievances men took a deputation to Vishnu. Vishnu told them of the boon that he himself had given Jalandhar and said that the only way to kill him was, if his wife was made unfaithful to him. *Tulasi* was so devoted to her husband that she would not even look at another man. Since the condition imposed for the death of Jalandhar was an impossible task for the mortals, they requested Vishnu, the Preserver, to come to their rescue. Vishnu agreed and approached *Tulasi* in the guise of her husband and seduced her. Having made her unfaithful to her husband, even though unwittingly, the demon was then easily killed. When *Tulasi* found out the ruse played on her, she confronted Vishnu in shame and anger and demanded an explanation for having been made a widow even when she had served Vishnu with unflinching faith and devotion. Vishnu gave a lengthy discourse justifying his actions saying, that to kill evil, sometimes even a god has to stoop to deception. However, to pacify her, he gave her an assurance that she would be worshipped by women for her faithfulness to her husband and her name would become immortal.

[1]Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp. 649-50.
[2]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, pp. 64-67.
[3]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India*, pp. 54, 154.

Also, so that they did not become widows. *Tulasi* was pacified by this assurance and committed Sati. From her ashes arose the *Tulasi* plant.

In a slightly different version of the story, Jalandhar confident of his invincibility, asked Indra, to return the fourteen gems that had been obtained from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned for extracting *amrita.* He claimed the gems as his property as he was born of the ocean. Indra did not know what to do and rushed to Siva and Vishnu for advise. On being told the reason of Jalandhar's invincibility, gods decided to do something to get him killed. Siva proud of his attractions, approached *Tulasi* but she repulsed him. Later Vishnu seduced her by approaching her in the form of her husband. When *Tulasi* found out the fraud, she cursed him to become a stone. Thus was created the *Salagram* stone worshipped as a form of Vishnu. Vishnu in turn cursed her to become a plant.

Another story is that Jalandhar's wife Vrinda was a woman of great beauty and Vishnu was enchanted with her. To entice him away from her, the gods appealed to Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, Gauri, the wife of Siva and Swadha, the wife of Brahma, for help.[1] Each goddess gave a seed for sowing at the place Vishnu was enchanted by Vrinda. The three seeds grew into *Dhatri,* Jasmine and *Tulasi* plants. The three plants appeared before Vishnu in the form of three beautiful women. Vishnu was enchanted by the three beauties and forgot Vrinda. The three women later went back to their original form of plants.

The reason for the plant to be called *Krishna Tulasi* is because Radha was in love with Krishna and her hold on him was so great that Krishna forgot his other duties and spent most of the time with her and the *gopis,* singing and dancing in the forests of Vrindavana or swinging from the branches of the *Kadamba* tree. To free him from his attachment to Radha, Narada *muni* went to Radha and asked for alms. The unsuspecting Radha promptly offered him anything that he wished for, presuming that he would ask for alms of clothes, jewels, foodstuff, cattle etc. Assured of her promise to him, Narada asked for Krishna as alms. Radha having given her word could not now retrace it. Seeing Radha's sad, dejected face, Narada offered to exchange Krishna for earthly goods provided they weighed equal to the weight of Krishna. Radha was prepared to barter anything to get her Krishna back. A huge scale was brought, Krishna sat on one pan and on the other pan were heaped material goods. Unknown to Radha, Krishna was an incarnation of Vishnu and no matter what earthly goods she put in the pan to balance the weight of Krishna, the pan with Krishna was heavier. Having put all her clothes, jewellery cooking pots, household articles and cattle, there was

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 131.

nothing left for her to balance Krishna's weight and she started weeping at the thought that she was ultimately going to lose him. Then she heard a voice from heaven telling her to remove everything and put only one leaf of *Tulasi* to balance the pans. The minute she did that, the two pans containing Krishna on one and the *Tulasi* leaf on the other, balanced perfectly and Radha got her Krishna back. And thus the plant came to be called *Krishna Tulasi* or *Kali Tulasi* as Krishna was dark of complexion (*Kali Tulasi* is a different variety of *Tulasi*).

Another story,[1] which give the reasons for *Tulasi* being dear to Krishna says that Satyabhama, one of the wives of Krishna, wanted Krishna as her husband, birth after birth and asked Narada *muni* for advise. He advised her to give Krishna to him as anything given to a Brahman was returned to the giver multifold. Satyabhama did as advised. Narada then started for the heavens with Krishna carrying his *Veena.* When the other wives of Krishna came to know of it, they were angry with Satyabhama and begged Narada to return Krishna to them as they also had a right on him as his wives. Satyabhama they told him, had no right to give away what did not belong solely to her. Narada answered that it was a sin to accept charity from a Brahman but if they wished to get Krishna back, they could buy him for his weight. This sounded a very reasonable proposition to the wives and a huge balance was brought. Krishna sat on one pan of the scales and the wives put all their ornaments in the other pan. But Krishna's pan continued to be heavier. Then Rukmini, the chief queen of Krishna, who was not present at the time Krishna was given in alms, was asked to come and suggest a solution. She was the only one among the wives who was aware of Krishna's divinity. She asked the wives to remove their ornaments from the pan and instead put a leaf of *Tulasi.* As soon as this was done, the pan with Krishna sitting in it, went upwards. Rukmini then told the other wives that *Tulasi* plant was more dear to Krishna then all of them put together.

According to some tribal myths, when Vishnu outraged the modesty of Vrinda, she cursed him and said, "I shall be born in the form of the sacred *Tulasi* plant and you will have to bear my leaves on your head for the wrong you have done to me." Krishna repented and granted her desire and now nothing is more acceptable to him than *Tulasi* leaves as offerings.

From Wollheim's book,[2] we learn that the *Tulasi* is one of the holiest plants of India because of the belief that goddess Sri has been incor-

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* pp. 55, 155; Thomas, *Epics, Myths and Legends of India,* p. 134.

[2]Wollheim da Fonseca, *Mythologie des alten Indian,* translated by Prof. Heinz Mode for the author of this book.

porated in it, and because of this the goddess is named *Tulasi.* The tree gets divine honours and sacrifices are made to it. It is written in *Kriya-yogasara,* chapter 23.3 sq.: Indra and all other gods should always honour this superb *Tulasi* which grants results to endeavours in all the four corners of the universe. *Tulasi* is on earth, in paradise and in the nether worlds but is difficult to obtain, therefore, whoever wishes to get the fruits of his endeavours, has to honour her. Wherever a *Tulasi* plant spreads, there Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and other gods will stay. Kesava always stays in the middle, Prajapati on the top and Siva in the stalks of the *Tulasi* leaves. Lakshmi, Saraswati, Gayatri, Chandika, Sachi and other goddesses stay in the *Tulasi* flowers. Indra, Agni, Samanas, Nairita, Varuna, Pavana, Kuvera live in its branches. *Adityas* and other planets all *visvas* (semi-divine beings), *vasus, munis,* all *devarshis, vidyadharas, gandharva, siddha,* and *apsaras* go to the groves of *Tulasi* and stay there. Where goddess *Tulasi* dwells, the goddess dear to Vishnu, there you find all other gods. Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Saraswati, Godavari, Chandrabhaga and all other holy rivers with their *ghats,* they all go to the *Tulasi* forest and dwell there. Whoever absorbed in devotion, honours *Tulasi,* honours Vishnu, Siva and all other gods.

Those who cut the grass growing near the *Tulasi* plant, Hari takes away their sins. Whoever during summer time waters the *Tulasi* plant with cool, fragrant water, get eternal bliss. Who covers the *Tulasi* plant during summer with an umbrella or a carpet, to shield it from the heat, he is delivered of all sin. One who waters the *Tulasi* with uninterrupted water, during the month of *Vaisakh,* gets the reward of having performed a horse sacrifice. Whoever sprinkles even a drop of water on *Tulasi,* he shall, freed of all sin, reach paradise. One who sprinkles milk on *Tulasi,* he is the fortunate one and the goddess of luck will stay in his house for ever. One who rubs cow-dung to the roots of *Tulasi,* as many particles of which become liquid, as many thousand *kalpas* he will enjoy the company of Brahma. One who places a lamp in the evening near the roots of the *Tulasi* plant, he will go to the palace of Vishnu, accompanied by ten million relatives of his. Whoever protects the *Tulasi* plant from cattle, goats, camels, donkeys, buffaloes and children, shall be protected by Kesava. Anyone who plants *Tulasi* with devotion, will attain the highest bliss on death. One who looks at *Tulasi* in the morning with devotion shall get the reward of looking at Vishnu himself. One who worships *Tulasi,* his life-duration, strength, glory, wealth and offspring will always increase. By taking the name of *Tulasi,* all sins are destroyed, by touching *Tulasi,* all pain perishes. Whoever eats a leaf of *Tulasi,* drives out sin and desire from his body. One who wears a *Tulasimala,* a garland of *Tulasi* beads, no sin can remain in his body. By carrying on his head,

water drawn from *Tulasi* leaves, a man gets the reward of bathing in the Ganges river. The man who honours *Tulasi* with an offering of *Durva ghas,* flowers and sacrificial food, gains the same reward as having made an offering to Vishnu. One who has honoured the divine by virtue, wealth, good thoughts, purifying *Tulasi* with sacrifices, flowers, perfume, clarified butter and lamps, does not have to separately honour Vishnu. Vishnu, the enemy of Mara will be happy with all those who plant *Tulasi* at pure places, to be worshipped by millions of people and gods grant such a person the highest bliss. Sacrifices, vows, ancestral worship, prayers, pious gifts and good work done near the *Tulasi* plant will remain eternally. Any pious work undertaken by mortals without *Tulasi* which is so dear to Narayana, is useless because the lotus-eyed God Vishnu is not happy. One who during a journey looks at *Tulasi* with devotion, by Hari's grace, completes his journey without a mishap. All that is said about *Tulasi* is true. The undivided sovereign of the world who is infinite himself takes *Tulasi* disregarding the *Mandara,* the Jasmine, the lotus and other fragrant flowers. *Tulasi* endowed with all the good points, can remove sins even if it is withered. The offenders who uproot *Tulasi* and throw it on the ground even without meaning to be disrespectful, Nrihari (Vishnu) will punish them by taking away their luck, offspring and even life. Sinful people who urinate or leave excretions, or gargle in *Tulasi* forests, Hari will take away their wealth and life. Fingers collecting *Tulasi* leaves for worship of Narayana are richly rewarded. Vaishnavas while collecting *Tulasi* leaves pray, "O mother *Tulasi* who is the cause of happiness of Govind, I collect you for *puja* of Narayana. Without you, Kesava has no happiness even with *Parijata* and other fragrant flowers. Without you, O blissful one, deeds are without fruits. Therefore, goddess *Tulasi,* I pluck you, be benevolent towards me. It hurts me to pluck you but I adore you, world mother *Tulasi.* Be kind towards me."

After the Vaishnavas have said these prayers and beaten their hands three times, they collect the leaves of *Tulasi.* The *Tulasi* leaves will be gathered carefully so that not a branch is shaken. If a single branch breaks, Vishnu is hurt. Even an old leaf fallen from a branch can be used to honour Vishnu, the defeater of Madhu and Kaitabha. The one who honours the Eternal Being with *Tulasi* leaves, he receives all that he desires....

In the chapter 24, verses 4-10 it says of *Tulasi*: "*Tulasi* is the holy Lakshmi, the wife of Bhagawan, therefore, the wise ones do not consider her from the point of Botany. Just as the mortals think piously of *Tulasi,* similarly Indra and other gods think of her in heaven. Where *Tulasi* is considered equal to the highest being, there is always bliss. What I say

is reliable. Even one who has all his life been a great sinner, if at the hour of death, gets a few drops of *Tulasi* juice, he will attain Hari. One who at the hour of death, carries earth, from where earlier a *Tulasi* plant grew, he will be freed of his sins and go to the dwelling of the disc thrower (Vishnu). One on whose mouth, head or ears, at the hour of death a *Tulasi* leaf is laid, his master is not Bhaskari (Yama)."

Brahmans consider the plant as a wife of Vishnu. But in Kerala,[1] the Nairs associate the plant with Siva. According to them, *Tulasi* is sacred to Siva and by worshipping *Tulasi* daily, they don't have to go elsewhere for worshipping him. They believe that by drinking the water in which a few leaves of *Tulasi* have been soaked, they can cure themselves of all kinds of disease.

When a Brahman is dying, a plant of *Tulasi* is brought before him and worship offered to it after which a small piece of its root is placed in his mouth and its leaves on his face, eyes, ears and chest. He is then sprinkled with *ganga-jal,* the holy water of river Ganga, with a twig of *Tulasi* amidst the chanting of the word, *Tulasi, Tulasi, Tulasi.* The man dies feeling assured that he was going straight to heaven.

A branch of *Tulasi* offered to Vishnu in the month of *Kartika* is more pleasing to him than the offering of a thousand cows. A twig of *Tulasi* dipped in saffron and offered to Vishnu assures one of becoming like Vishnu and partaking of his joys and happiness. To offer a twig of *Tulasi* to one suffering from anxiety is sure to secure a satisfying end to his suffering. One obtains pardon from all sins by merely looking at it; gets purified by touching; gets cured of all sins by worshipping it.

On the eleventh day of *Kartika,* a special *puja* is offered to *Tulasi* after which the ceremonial marriage of *Tulasi* to the *Amalaka* tree symbolically God Narsi (Vishnu) is performed, and then only the marriage season is declared open. Marriages stop being performed after *Ekadasi* in the month of *Ashadha.* Women pray to *Tulasi* for the safe return of their husbands and son who have gone on a journey. *Tulasi* is worshipped on the full moon day of *Aswin,* by maidens desiring a husband.

Tulasi is planted in homes so that no evil spirits come near it as it is believed to be *Butagni,*[2] i.e., a killer of demons. According to the present author, the plant being highly medicinal and used in household medicine, it was called *Bhutagni* and the *bhuts* that the plant burns or destroys are the diseases that are cured by it. The leaves of *Tulasi* are never plucked on Tuesdays and Sundays or ever boiled as that torments the soul of the plant.

To avoid the evil influence of an eclipse, *Tulasi* leaves sprinkled with

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* pp. 54, 154.
[2]Ibid., p. 12.

the water of Ganga are put in jars containing drinking water and cooked food, and thus kept pure while the eclipse lasts.[1] The plant which is an aromatic herb and scientifically proved to be highly medicinal, probably gave rise to these beliefs.

Its leaves possess insecticidal and antibacterial properties and is mosquito repellent. Seeds yield a fixed oil. Leaves are stimulant, diaphoretic, antiperiodic, expectorant, used in catarrh and bronchitis, ringworm and other cutaneous diseases; infusion used as a stomachic. Decoction of roots given as a diaphoretic in malarial fevers. Seeds mucilaginous and demulcent, used in genito-urinary disorders. Leaves are considered as a cure for stress. The seeds are believed to have the property of killing passion. This led to a curious custom of giving grounded seeds to young widows so that their chastity was preserved.

30

ORYZA SATIVA Linn.

FAMILY GRAMINEAE; POACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Mana, Dhanya
Hindi	:	Dhan, Chaval
English	:	Rice

Rice is considered a fertility symbol the world over. In India rice is used on all auspicious occasions. Rice is a wholesome food, giving strength, therefore, there is a strong belief that rice eaters are more fertile.

In Hindu mythology, Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth.[2] Rice is also associated with wealth and, therefore, rice is symbolically goddess Lakshmi, and is offered at all religious and auspicious ceremonies. Rice is worshipped as Lakshmi on the full moon day following Durga-*puja.* In Bengal the ritual of rice worship as Lakshmi is repeated on every Thursday of *Agrahayana* or *Magh,* and paddy stalks or unhusked paddy is worshipped as the goddess herself.

A popular belief among the Buddhists is that when after long austerities and meditation, Siddhartha's body became emaciated due to starvation and austerities, it was rice cooked in milk that revived him. According to the story, Sujata milked one hundred cows and made fifty cows drink that milk. Then she milked those fifty cows and gave twenty-five cows that milk to drink. Again, she milked those twenty-five cows and gave ten cows to drink that milk. Ultimately she milked ten cows and gave one cow the milk to drink. It was the milk of this last cow that was very light and nourishing. Sujata cooked new rice thrashed by herself with sugar and milk from this cow, and gave it to Siddhartha to eat which revived his strength after the prolonged austerities he had undergone. Since, it was the rice pudding that saved the life of Siddhartha, rice came to be held sacred by the Buddhists. It is new rice that is used for religious ceremonies and not the old rice which is preferred for cooking.

Rice being one of the earlier cereals known to man, it is considered to be Prajapati or Janardana and worshipped. The custom of throwing rice on the bridal couple or offering rice by the bridal couple to their paternal household deity dates back to almost prehistoric times, this symbolic reference of rice to fertility being universal. Rice is believed to scare demons particularly those that check fertility. From this belief perhaps stems the old marriage ritual of pouring rice into the sacrificial fire by the bride and the bridegroom, though it is puffed rice that is used, and the custom of presenting rice tinged with turmeric powder as invitation to the wedding feast. Among more affluent societies, saffron is used instead of turmeric powder for the same purpose. In certain parts of India, the bridal couple stand on a pile of rice during the marriage ceremony and the guests throw a few grains of rice on the pile at the close of the recitation of the religious text.

Whatever may be the local variations of ceremonies connected with marriages or at the birth of children, rice is always a part of the ingredients used on such functions. Rice being held sacred, it is used for all religious ceremonies, even at the oath taking of a king or at the *namkaran,* the ceremony of naming a child. Rice offering stands for the perception of existence, consciousness and experience of all beings.[1]

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. II, p. 82; Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend,* vol. II, p. 1131.

[2]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* pp. 54, 154.

[1]Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism,* p. 381.

31

PANDANUS ODORATISSIMUS Linn.f.

syn. Pandanus tectorius Soland

FAMILY PANDANACEAE

Sanskrit : Ketaki
Hindi : Keura, Keora
English : Screw Pine

One day Siva was playing a game of dice with his wife Parvati. Parvati defeated him. Feeling ashamed he hid in the *Ketaki* woods and got absorbed in meditation. Parvati sensed his feelings and approached him to entice him back. With his eyes closed in deep meditation, Mahadeva neither saw her nor felt her presence. Parvati then approached him wearing *Ketaki* flowers in her hair. The sweet fragrance of *Ketaki* flowers distracted him. Getting annoyed at being thus disturbed, he cursed the *Ketaki* flowers.[1]

There is another legend giving the reason for Siva to curse the plant. From the primordial waters arose a fiery *linga* that kept on growing in size. Both Vishnu and Brahma were astonished to see such a fiery sight and not knowing what the *linga* signified, decided to investigate. Vishnu in the form of a Boar dived into the primordial waters to find its lower end and Brahma in his form of a Swan flew into the heavens to reach its upper end. He flew higher and higher but the *linga* kept on rising higher than Brahma could fly. Vishnu could not find its depth and Brahma could not reach its summit. Ultimately both Brahma and Vishnu came back without having found the secret of the *linga*. The *linga* then burst open and Siva appeared before them standing within the *linga*. Seeing Siva in the *linga*, both Brahma and Vishnu bowed before him, accepting his supremacy. Whereas, Vishnu accepted his defeat at not finding the bottom end of the *linga*, Brahma said that he had reached its summit and *Ketaki* flower that was coming down, bore false witness saying that Brahma had indeed reached its summit.[2] For this falsehood, *Ketaki* was rejected by Siva who cursed her and said that from now onwards its flowers will never be offered in worship. According to *Skanda Purana* (1.1.6), Brahma was denied the worship for uttering

[1]K. Biswas and R.N. Chopra, *Common Medicinal Plants of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas*, p. 3.

[2]Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, p. 235.

this falsehood. The Nair girls do not use its flowers for adorning their hair because the plant was cursed by Siva. Flowers of *Ketaki* are generally worn by young girls to win lovers.

Ketaki is a densely branched, rarely erect, evergreen tree growing in the low moist swampy places in the Andaman islands and on the coastline of India. The plant with strong roots and its trunk studded with short prickles, is aphrodisiac, and induces sleep. Its seeds are said to cure wounds of the heart, perhaps symbolic of heartaches. An extraction of *Keora* or *Kewda attar* from the male flowers is used in various industries such as *sherbets*, lotions, cosmetics, soap, hair oil, etc. Juice obtained from the inflorescence is used in rheumatic arthritis and in veterinary medicine. Leaves used in medicines for the cure of leprosy, scabies, and diseases of heart and brain. Anthers of its flowers are used for diseases of blood.

32

PROSOPIS CENERARIA Druce

syn. P. spicigera Linn.

FAMILY MIMOSACEAE

Sanskrit, Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya : Sami
Hindi, Punjabi : Jhand, Jand
English : Mimosa

In the *Krita* age all the celestials approached Varuna and said: "As Sakra, the lord of the celestials, always protect us from every fear, similarly be thou the lord of all rivers. Thou always resides, O god, in the ocean, the home of Makaras. This ocean, the lord of rivers will then be under thy dominion. Thou shalt wax and wane with Soma.[1] Thus addressed, Varuna answered: "Let it be so."

According to the rites laid down in the scriptures, Varuna took residence in the ocean and began to protect seas, lakes, rivers and other receptacles of water, and all aquatic creatures. Varuna having his abode in the waters, they became a place of pilgrimage or *tirtha*. Baladeva, the slayer of *asura* Pralamba, after having bathed in the river, the abode of Varuna proceeded to the *Agni tirtha* which was the spot where Agni, the

[1]Soma in this context means the moon.

God of Fire, the eater of clarified butter, frightened at the curse of Rishi Bhrigu, had concealed himself within the *Sami* wood. At the disappearance of Agni, the gods went to Brahma and said: "Agni has disappeared for reasons unknown to us. Let not all living beings be destroyed. Create fire. O Lord." Gods with Vasava or Brihaspati at their head, searched for the missing God of Fire and found him hiding in the *Sami* wood. Since then, because of Bhrigu's curse, Agni became an eater of everything. Balarama after bathing at the *Agni tirtha,* the spot where Agni had entered the *Sami* wood, proceeded to *Brahmayoni,* where Brahma had exercised his functions of creation.[1]

In the *Mahabharata* there is a story regarding the sacredness of the *Sami* wood.[2] A *asura* called Taraka was inflicting atrocities on deities and *rishis* and for a redress, they approached Brahma who gave them his word that the Vedas will not be destroyed and that somehow he would get rid of Taraka. Deities reminded Brahma that because of his boon to Taraka, the latter could not be killed by the deities, *asuras* or *rakshasas.* For having tried to stop propagation in earlier days, deities had been cursed by Uma, the wife of Siva as a result they could not have any offspring. Brahma replied that at the time the curse was pronounced by Uma, Agni was not present and, therefore, was free from the curse. He told them that Agni would beget an offspring who transcending all the deities, *danavas, rakshasas, gandharvas, nagas* and the feathery creatures, will slay Taraka. He further said: "Kama is identical with Rudra's seed, a portion of which fell into Agni. That blazing seed will be cast by Agni into Ganga for producing an offspring from her. This child will destroy the enemies of the gods. Let the eater of sacrificial libations, Agni, who alone is capable of killing Taraka, being free of Uma's curse, be sought. Agni is the Lord of the Universe. Will or desire is identified with Agni.[3]

Deities and *rishis* then went in search of Agni to all corners of the three worlds but could not find him as he had merged himself into self, i.e., waters, for water is identified with Agni. Agni having entered the waters, the aquatic animals were scorched by the heat produced. A frog living in the water could not bear the heat anymore. As the deities were searching for Agni, it came above the water surface and informed them of Agni's whereabouts. When Agni came to know of frog's treachery, he cursed him by depriving his entire race of their organs of taste. Seeing the plight to which the frogs were reduced, for having done them a service, the deities showed them a favour and said that inspite of all the inconveniences caused to them by the lack of tongues, the Earth would

[1] *Mahabharata,* vol. VI, Salya Parva, p. 414; Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* p. 117.
[2] *Mahabharata,* vol. X, Anusasana Parva, p. 133; Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* p. 61.
[3] Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* pp. 102-3.

still hold them and they will not starve. After bestowing this boon on the frogs, the deities continued their search of Agni but failed to find him. An elephant told them that Agni was hiding in the *Aswattha* tree. Incensed by the betrayal of the elephant, Agni cursed all the elephants and said that their tongues would be bent backwards. The deities then said to the elephants that even with their tongues bent inwards, they would be able to eat and make incoherent sounds. Having blessed the elephants, the deities resumed their search of Agni. Having issued out of the *Aswattha* tree, Agni had entered the *Sami* tree. His new abode was disclosed by a parrot. Enraged, Agni cursed the entire lot of parrots and deprived them of their power of speech. The deities felt compassion for the parrots and blessed them saying that though their tongues had been turned back, they will still have speech, sweet and indistinguishable and confined to the letter K. Deities then requested Agni to help them destroy Taraka. Agni agreed and the semen of Siva that it had swallowed earlier, he dropped it into the river Ganga and hence was born Skanda who killed Taraka when he was only seven days old.

Since Agni resided in the *Sami* wood for a while, *Sami* tree is considered as a sacred tree and its wood as the right wood for producing fire during sacrifices, and to this day, the sacrificial fire is produced by rubbing together two sticks, one of which is the *Sami* wood and the other of *Aswattha.*[1] (See *Aswattha.*)

In ancient times, kings sometimes performed sacrifices and for that, altars were constructed at short distances from one another. The distances were measured by hurling a heavy piece of *Sami* wood from an altar. The site of the next altar was fixed at the spot where the wood of *Sami* had fallen.[2]

Sami is considered an incarnation of *Devi,* the goddess. Since *Sami* had fire in it and Rudra is an embodiment of fire, Siva or Rudra is considered as a *yupa* post made of *Sami* wood.

An evil spirit is believed to reside in it but it is evil only if a bed is made or repaired with its wood. Such a bed cannot be slept in.[3]

[1] Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. II, 355.
[2] *Mahabharata,* vol. XI, Anusasana Parva, p. 198.
[3] Jobes, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend,* vol. I, p. 5.

33

PIPER BETLE Linn.

FAMILY PIPERACEAE

Sanskrit : Nagavalli, Tambula
Hindi : Paan
English : Betel

In Maharashtra, before the betel vine is planted, a suitable area is selected for its cultivation. A goat is sacrificed with attendant rituals and chanting of *mantras.* The head of the goat is buried in one corner of the ground allotted for the *Paan mara.* The four hooves of the goat are buried, one at each corner of the selected area, and the blood of the goat is mixed with earth and used to mark off the area selected for the *Paan mara.** Rows of *Shobhanjana* trees are planted and the betel vine planted at its base so that it climbs up the *Shobhanjana* tree for support. The leaves of the tree being finally divided, they provide the right amount of shade to the betel vine. On the outer boundary of the *Paan mara,* trees of *Mandara* are planted in a single row to act as wind breakers. A six foot high matting is put along the *Paan mara,* almost like a wall to prevent the entry of intruders. Only a very small opening is left on one side for the cultivator to enter and that too is kept closed most of the time. The owner of the *Paan mara* takes off his shoes before entering it and creeps in on his belly with hands joined in salutation, just as he would do to enter a temple, for to the farmer, his *Paan mara* is almost equal to a temple. This is a ritual strictly adhered to and no god-fearing cultivator will enter this sanctified area for fear of inviting the wrath of the protecting deity of the *Paan mara.*

Since the betel vine climbs the support, clinging to it with its stem, it is compared to the *nagas,* the serpents. To propitiate them, special prayers are offered to the *nagas* on *Naga-panchami* day. It is believed that thus propitiated, snakes, who normally love cool, shady places, shun the *Paan mara* and if one is ever found inside it, it is always non-poisonous.

Women during their menstruation period are not allowed to enter it. Even if a woman does venture in by mistake, catastrophe will strike the plantation and all vines would dry up. The villagers believe that if the ritual of planting the vines is properly adhered to, no catastrophe would

*The author visited some villages where betel vine is cultivated. Members of the village Panchayat and other villagers accompanied her to the *Paan mara* and described the rituals of setting up the *Paan mara* as described in the text.

come to the *Paan mara.* A strong belief held till today by the villagers as told to the author is, that even if there is a severe hailstorm in the vicinity, it by-passes the *Paan mara.*

The leaves of the betel vine are highly prized. The plant being delicate, it is nurtured with great care. Naturally, therefore, rituals and legends have cropped up around it. On various occasions and ceremonies, betel leaves are offered to Siva[1] and they are considered sacred. An interesting legend is around a poor family all members of which committed suicide to avoid having to feel embarrassed at not having anything to offer their guests.[2] At their death, the gods felt sorry for the poor and decided to give them something inexpensive which they could offer to their guests. This honour came to the betel vine which till then was growing in the heavens, and to *Supari* (Areca catechu) till today, not only the poor but even the rich offer *Paan Supari* to their guests. (See Nicotiana tabaccum.) Apart from *Supari* being offered to the poor for lack of any other food, it was given another honour. The cost of worship being very high, it was decided by the deities that an uncut *Supari* should be worshipped symbolically as Ganesa, the god who removes all obstacles, and his worship takes precedence over the worship of all other deities.

In the olden days, plants could speak like human beings. The betel vine used to grow in heaven. When asked by Siva to come down to earth, the betel vine was unhappy and said that on earth she would not get any respect and her leaves would be squashed underfoot, thrown in the mud and after being chewed, spat out. What honour would that be for her. Siva had earlier been annoyed with her and had pronounced a curse on her. But he also saw her point. Since the curse once pronounced could not be taken back, he relaxed it by saying that on earth she would be honoured and her leaves used for all auspicious ceremonies. She would occupy a place of pride at child-birth rites, consecration ceremonies, marriages, worship of various types and even in death ceremonies. After being thus assured of her place, the betel vine came down to earth. The leaves of the betel vine are used to sprinkle holy water at all ceremonies, a betel leaf is put on the chest of the dead body before it is cremated.

Along with cloves, castor oil, mouse, salt, red, black, white and yellow colours, betel leaves are also considered as scarer of demons and evil spirits.

A perennial, dioecious creeper extensively cultivated in hot and

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India,* p. 324; idem, *The Tribal Art of Middle India,* p. 64.
[2]*Siva Purana,* vol. I, Vidyesvarasamhita, ch. 9, p. 60; ch. 18, p. 129; Rudrasamhita, ch. 11, p. 222; *Siva Purana,* vol. IV, p. 206.

damp parts of India, Sri Lanka, extending to the Malaya islands, the betel vine is believed to have come originally from Java. It is a highly medicinal plant: Its leaves are stimulant and chewed as a carminative after smearing it with a paste of *Katha* (catechu) along with *Supari*, cardomans, aniseeds and grated coconut. Its crushed leaves are used in snake bite. They have an essential oil used in respiratory catarrhs and as an antiseptic. Juice of the leaves is used in cases of night blindness and other eye affections and to relieve cerebral congestion.

34

PUTRANJIVA ROXBURGUII Wall.

FAMILY EUPHORBIACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Putranjiva, Jivaka
Hindi	:	Jayaputra, Jiaputa
English	:	Child life tree

Perpetuation of one's family name has motivated so may traditions and beliefs that they are unsurpassed by any other. Though for the continuation of the human race both girls and boys are required, it is only for sons that men crave. The jubilation at the birth of a son in India, has no parallel anywhere in the world and the life of a Hindu household revolves mainly round the male sex. From birth to death, he is entangled in customary ablutions and ceremonies and to this day, the funeral pyre can only be lit by a son, and ceremonies connected with ancestor worship are performed by him. Naturally, therefore, the birth of a son is considered most auspicious. It is for this reason alone that to a large number of plants are attributed the quality of possessing medicinal properties for begetting male children. One such plant is *Jivaka*. A potion made from the tree is believed to be a sure recipe for begetting sons. Hindu women consider the tree as sacred, particularly women from orthodox families as their entire future depends on whether they can give birth to a son or not.[1]

Hindu women worship the tree and rosaries made from the stones of the fruits are worn by them so that their children remain healthy.[2] Parents whose children do not survive, use the rosaries as they believe them to possess divine powers and keep the children in good health.

[1]Dutt, *Garuda Purana*, p. 134.
[2]Mathur, *Systematic Botany*, p. 190.

35

SARACA ASOCA (ROXB.) De Wilde
syn. Saraca indica Auct. Non Linn.

FAMILY CAESALPINACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Asoka, Asok
Hindi	:	Asoka, Asok
English	:	Ashoka

Trees in India have always been treated like human beings, endowed with a soul, a heart that weeps with grief and laughs with joy. They have feelings like ordinary mortals. *Asoka* tree with its orange-red blossoms: "shines like a young warrior bathed in the sanguine shower of the furious fight."[1]

Asoka means 'without grief' and, therefore, the tree is believed to be a remover of sorrow. Brahma said: "He, who eats eight buds of *Asoka* flowers on the eighth day of the moon's increase in the month of *Chaitra*, marked by the asterism *Punarvasu* suffers no bereavements in life."[2]

Indian literature is full of instances where a tree is addressed as if it was alive and possessed feelings. For instance, in the *Mahabharata*,[3] Damayanti while looking for her husband Nala, goes into the forest of *Asoka* trees. Approaching the first tree looking 'charming with blossoms and its heavy load of foliage resounding with the notes of birds,' Damayanti with tears in her eyes began to lament saying: 'Oh, this grateful tree in the heart of the forest decked in flowers, looks beautiful like a charming king of hills. O, beauteous *Asoka*, do thou speedily free me from grief. Has thou seen king Nala, the slayer of foes and the beloved husband of Damayanti."

The tree is a great favourite for committing suicide and many stories are current about the noose being hung from the *Asoka* tree.[4]

Asoka tree is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists. Hindus worship it on the thirteenth of *Chaitra*. The tree was blessed by Siva to be immortal as his wife Parvati worshipped him with its flowers, hence the tree remains evergreen. Its orange-red flowers are used as temple offerings. On *Asoka Shashthi* day, women from Bengal eat the flower

[1]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, vol. VIII, p. 7.
[2]Dutt, *Garada Purana*, p. 385.
[3]*Mahabharata*, vol. II, Sabha Parva, p. 141.
[4]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, vol. VII, pp. 54, 88, 100, 117, 178.

buds and believe that drinking the water in which its flowers have been soaked, their children will be protected from harm.[1]

Asoka tree is a symbol of love and dedicated to Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love. He is worshipped with garlands made of its flowers. One of the five arrows of Kamadeva is tipped with the flowers of *Asoka.*[2] But according to another account the five arrows of Kamadeva through which he perturbs the five senses and inspires passion are made of five fragrant flowers. These are the blue lotus, jasmine, mango flowers. *Champaka* and *Sirisa* flowers.[3]

There is an ancient belief that the tree will flower only if grown on a spot where a chaste woman has walked or when kicked by a young virgin. A *vrikshaka,* i.e., a young forest maiden is often depicted in sculpture, standing against the trunk of a *Asoka* tree and her foot kicking it, and the tree is full of flowers.

The association of women with trees is common. There is a belief that the *Kurbaka* (not identifiable) covers itself with blossoms when a lovely woman clasps it; *Tilaka,* when she looks at it, *Asoka* when it is kicked by her foot, mango when her hand touches it; *Kesava* or *Bakula* when sprinkled with intoxicants from her mouth.[4]

The tree is believed to have certain charms in preserving chastity.[5] It is said that when Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, abducted Sita while Ramachandra and Lakshmana were away, and took her to Lanka, she escaped from the clutches of Ravana and found refuge in a grove of *Asoka* trees and Ravana could not touch her.

Asoka tree is worshipped by Buddhists because Sakyamuni or Buddha was born under an *Asoka* tree.[6] This tree is also associated with the attainment of omniscience of Jaina *muni* Mahavira. His initiation under this tree, according to the Jainas, was attended by gods. The tree is planted by Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas near their temples. The tree is sacred to Siva and is planted on the south-east-corner of the house or temple.

[1]Gupta, *Tree Symbol Worship in India,* p. 39.
[2]Elwin, *Tribal, Myths of Middle India,* p. 131.
[3]Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism,* p. 312.
[4]Johann Jacob Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India,* pp. 326, 539.
[5]Blatter and Millard, *Some Beautiful Trees of India,* p. 132.
[6]Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History,* p. 33; Randhawa, *The Cult of Trees and Tree Worship in Buddhist-Hindu Sculpture,* pp. 7-8; idem, *A History of Indian Agriculture,* vol. I, p. 325.

36

SARCOSTEMMA ACIDUM Voigt

FAMILY ASCLEPIADACEAE

Sanskrit : Soma
Hindi : Somalata
English : Sour Creeper

Soma is described as a god, a drink and as a plant.[1] As a drink, it is considered a drought of immortality, *amrita* which has great curative powers. As a deity he is a wise seer who inspires good thoughts and poetry. Soma is also Vanaspati, the lord of plants and woods. In a few hymns of the *Rigveda,* he is identified with the moon. The ninth chapter of the *Rigveda* is devoted to the Soma deity. *Soma* plant, which grew on the hills, corresponds to Haoma of Avesta and like the fire-cult, the Soma cult is also identical to the Iranian custom where Soma, under the name Haoma, plays the same role in the worship and sacrifice by the followers of *Avesta.*

In *Rigveda* Soma deity is described as a plant which yields intoxicating beverage. This is offered at sacrifices, partaken by the worshipper and poured into the sacred flame on the altar of sacrifice. The *Soma* drink is said to dispel sin from the heart, destroy falsehood and promote truth. The ninth chapter of *Gita* mentions Soma as: Those who are devoted to the three wisdoms, *Dharma, Artha, Kama,* drink *Soma,* become similar and pray for paradise.

According to the *Rigveda,* Soma deity which is mountain born, comes after Agni and Indra in importance. Varuna who placed the Sun in the sky and fire in the water, placed *Soma* on the mountains. Like fire, *Soma* is brought to men by superhuman agency. Whereas fire was brought to earth from heaven by Matarishvan, *Soma* was brought from the mountains by a falcon. The original *Soma* plant grew in the heavens.

Parallels were recognised between the celestial and earthly spheres.[2] Soma, king, moon, dwells in the *Soma* plant, the stalks of which yield an intoxicating drink. This drink was considered as the terrestrial counterpart of the elixir of immortality, *amrita.* On Mt. Sumeru, gods drank the *amrita* that was present in the cup of the moon. To attract Indra and other gods to the diurnal rituals of Vedic times as a substitute for *amrita,* the juice of a terrestrial plant was offered at sacrifices.

[1]Ragozin, *Vedic India,* pp. 168-70; Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology,* pp. 104-15; Hopkins, *The Religions of India,* pp. 112-26; Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. II, pp. 474-79.
[2]Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia,* vol. I, p. 164.

The plant associated with the Soma cult grew on the Himalayan highlands of Kashmir, in the deep valleys of which the Aryan tribes lived from very early times probably even before the Rigvedic hymns were compiled and the complicated priestly ritual with regard to their use was rigidly instituted. The cult of Soma sacrifice started in the north mountainous region from where it spread geographically south-eastwards with the spread of the race. Since very likely the *Soma* plant did not flourish well in the hotter regions, immense quantities of the plant needed for consumption by the increasing Aryan settlements had to be got from the mountains, which practice being highly inconvenient because of the distance involved, the real *Soma* plant was ultimately substituted by another plant which also yielded an intoxicating beverage, a plant which answered at least to a partial morphological description of the original *Soma* plant. This plant is known as *Soma* or *Soma lata* and also belongs to family Asclepiadaceae.

According to some historians, there were five plants from which the juice was extracted. One was Ephedra pachyclade (Hindi: *Hum, Huma*) which grows from Siberia to the north Himalayas. This theory is plausible if we accept the arctic home for the Vedas.[1] the description of the plant is: "With hanging bough, bare of leaves and of a light brown colour; knotty joints containing an abundance of slightly astringent, milky juice in a fibrous cane like outer rind."

Adara is a plant prescribed as a substitute for *Soma*. In the *Satapatha Brahmana* it is called *Putika* which is not identifiable. It could be *Putlika* or *Putiki*.[2]

For the extraction of the juice a regular trade started between certain mountain tribes who used to gather the plant and sell it to the Aryans. The Aryans considered the tribes contemptible for trading in a divine plant and did not allow them to extract the *Soma rasa* or to drink it. The price the Aryans paid to these mountain tribes for the plant was a reddish-brown cow with light brown eyes, comparable perhaps to the colour of the *Soma* plant. This cow was not allowed to be roughly handled.

The juice from the plant was pressed with various attendant rituals. It was mixed with other ingredients and fermented to make the intoxicating sacrificial beverage which was the holiest offering to gods. There were rituals attendant at every step of the extraction of *Soma rasa*. The plant had to be collected by uprooting it during moonlight and carried to the sacrificial alter on a carriage drawn by two goats. The altar or the

[1]B.G. Tilak, *The Arctic Home of the Vedas*.

[2]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, vol. II, p. 11. The Sanskrit name *Putika* cannot be identified but it could be *Putilika* or *Putiki*.

vedi was prepared from *Kusa ghas* where the gods ultimately came and sat. The *Soma* plant was laid on the consecrated spot before being pressed. *Pravargya* was a special preliminary rite performed in the sacrifice.[1] *Abhishava* was the extraction of the juice from the *Soma* plant and its consecration with *mantras*. The vessels for keeping the juice were made of the wood of *Aswattha*.

The unadulterated clear, shining juice was called *Sukra, Suchi* or *Suddaha*. The filtered juice was put into jars, i.e., *kalasa* or *vats* called *drona*. In the jars, the juice was mixed with milk or water to sweeten it.

The *Soma* mixture called *asir* was of three different kinds. Mixed with milk, it was called *Go*; with sour milk, *dadhi* and with barley, *yava*. The mixture was referred to as a bright robe.[2]

Soma rasa was pressed three times a day, morning, mid-day and evening. The first two extractions were offered to Indra and the one pressed in the evening was meant for the *Ribbhus*. *Soma rasa* was drunk by the gods at the ceremonial offering made to them by the priests. The drink nourished them and threw them into a joyous intoxication. The divine beverage was supposed to purify the drinker, give health and immortality, destroy his enemies and pave the entry of the drinker to heaven. The drink produced an exhilarating effect and a feeling of being divine. It was considered as the earthly form of the celestial *Soma*. Symbolically, the stones on which the plant was pressed were the clouds; the stones used for pressing the plants were the thunderbolts; sky was the sieve; liquor that fell through the sieve was rain and the *kalasa* or vessel holding the juice was *samundra*, the celestial sea that holds all the atmospheric waters.

According to the Upanishads, the moon is king Soma. He is also known as a warrior god when he is depicted as vigorous and well armed, fully equipped to battle against the demons who abide in the dark. Soma deity is also considered as the Lord of streams and the admixture of the juice has a special relation with the waters. According to one myth, Soma is married to Surya, the Sun maiden. He is also believed to be a son of Rishi Atri and Anasuya and married twenty-seven daughters of Daksha who are all personified as the twenty-seven lunar asterism.

The effect of intoxication seemed to be due to the inherent divinity of the plant. The plant, therefore, was regarded as divine and the preparation of the draught was looked upon as a sacred ceremony.

According to Mackenzie,[3] "Soma worship appears to be connected with the belief that life was in the blood; literally the 'life blood'... the

[1]*Mahabharata*, vol. XIII, Aswamedha Parva, p. 168.

[2]R.C. Majumdar, *The Vedic Age*, p. 378; Macdonell, *A Vedic Reader*, pp. 152-64.

[3]Mackenzie, *Indian Myths and Legends*, p. 37.

blood of trees was the name for the sap; sap was water impregnated or vitalised by *Soma,* the essence of life. Water worship and Soma-worship were probably identical, the moon was believed to be the source of growth and moisture, being the fountain head of 'the water of life'."

37

SESAMUM INDICUM Linn.
syn. Sesamum orientale Linn.
FAMILY PEDALIACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Tili, Tila
Hindi	:	Til
English	:	Gingelly, Sesame

Tila has been in use in religious ceremonies from very early times. In the *Mahabharata,*[1] Bhishma in answer to a query of Yudhishthira regarding objects dedicated to *Pitris* which become inexhaustible, said: '*Pitris* remain gratified for a month if *Tila* seeds, rice, barley, *Masha,* water, roots and various fruits are offered at *sraddhas.* According to Manu, *sraddhas* performed with a copious offering of *Tila* seeds, become inexhaustible. Out of all kinds of food, *Tila* seeds are regarded as best. *Tila* offered along with fish at *sraddhas, pitris* remain gratified for a period of two months; *Tila* offered with mutton, they remain gratified for three months and with the flesh of hare for four. With the flesh of goat, they remain gratified for five months; with bacon for six months and with the flesh of birds, for seven. With venison called *Prishata,* for eight months and with that obtained from Ruru, for nine months and with the meat of *Gavaya* for ten months; with the meat of a buffalo, for eleven months; *Tila* presented with beef at *sraddha,* their gratification lasts for a full one year. *Payasa* mixed with ghee is as acceptable to the *pitris* as beef; with the flesh of *Vadrinara* (probably a bull), for twelve years. Flesh of a rhinoceros gratifies them limitlessly. Herb *Kalasaka,* petals of *Kanchana* and meat of a goat offered together, their gratification is inexhaustible."

Bhishma also mentioned the objects that should not be offered: "Species of millet called *Kodrava* and *Pulaka* should never be offered at *sraddha,* also asofoetida, onion, garlic, fruit of *Sobhanjana, Raktakanchana,* meat of animals killed with poisoned arrows, all varieties of Cucurbita

[1] *Mahabharata,* vol. X, Anusasana Parva, pp. 156-57.

pepo, Kalongi, salt called *Vid, Sitapaki* herb, sprouts of bamboo, *Sringara, Jamvu* and *Sudarsana.*" (*Sudarshanaballi?*)

Offerings of a man increase who stands every night for a full one year, under a *Karanjaka* tree, holding a lamp in one hand and roots of *Suvarchala* (*Suvarnaka?*)

Sesame seeds sprang from the limbs of Rishi Kashyapa.[1] Offering of *Tila* seeds are effective in removing sins.

38

SHOREA ROBUSTA Gaertn.f.
FAMILY DIPTEROCARPACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Sala, Sal
Hindi	:	Sal, Shal

Siddhartha Gautama who later became the Buddha was born under a *Sala* tree in the sixth century BC. Other trees connected with the legends of his birth are the mango, the *Asoka* and the *Palasa.* When Maya Devi, the mother of Siddhartha sensed the time of his birth near, she expressed a desire to visit her parents. On the way to her parents home, she rested in a grove of *Sala* trees growing in the Lumbini gardens. Alighting from her carriage, she went near a *Sala* tree and stretched her hand upwards to pluck some flowers. As she did that, Siddhartha was born from her right side and the tree showered flowers on the new born child. Gautama Buddha also attained *Nirvana* in a grove of *Sala* trees.

According to a Buddhist *Jataka,*[2] when Brahmadatta ruled as a king of Benares, he wished to have a palace built supported by only one column. The builders travelled far and wide in search of a tree big and strong enough to support a palace and ultimately found it. It was the *Sala* tree growing in the palace grounds of king Brahmadatta. Getting permission of the king to cut down the magnificent *Sala* tree, the builders first worshipped the tree in the customary manner with garlands of flowers, lamps and incense and prayed to the deities and *vanadevatas* who dwelt on the tree to go elsewhere and not to blame them for felling the tree and warned: "On the seventh day from now, we shall cut down this tree."

[1] Ibid., vol. XI, p. 790.
[2] *Jataka Stories,* Bhaddasala Jataka, book IV, p. 97.

The spirit of the tree was overwhelmed with grief, not at his own impending destruction but at the thought that with his death would be destroyed all the young *Sala* saplings growing under him, as well as the deities and other *vanadevatas* that dwell on him. He decided to plead with the king for their lives and visited him at midnight, adorned in a divine splendour and addressed him: "For the past 60,000 years, I have lived in your kingdom, worshipped by all and considered a lucky tree. Many a king have come and gone; many a town and house they made but no one has so far touched me."

The king answered that he had never seen a tree with such a mighty trunk, thick and strong and fit for a king's palace. It was the right trunk for a single column support for his palace.

The tree spirit of the *Sala* tree replied: "If you are bent upon killing me, then cut me up piece meal. Cut first the top, then the middle and lastly the roots. That way death would not be painful to me."

The king was astonished at the reply given by the tree spirit and said: "Cutting limb by limb was the most painful of deaths. Why do you then prefer such a mode of dying?"

The tree spirit answered: "My kith and kin are sheltered by me, also many other deities dwell on me. If you cut me down at once, my fall would kill them and that would be most painful to me."

When the king heard this, he was overcome with emotion. The *Sala* tree was not worried about his own death but about the pain that he would inflict upon his dependents. The king decided against building the magnificent palace of his dreams.

In the story, Ananda was the king, deities in the form of the young saplings were the followers of Buddha and the *Sala* tree was the Bodhisattva himself.

There is a Baiga tribal legend connected with the *Sala* tree and some other plants.[1] The story goes back to the *swayamvara*, i.e., the selecting of a husband by the mother Earth. At the *swayamvara*, the mother Earth put the garland round the neck of Nanga Baiga which annoyed the gods. Not happy at her choice of a husband, they threw dirt on them. After the marriage ceremony was over, Nanga Baiga took his bride, the mother Earth, home. On the way, mother Earth said to Baiga that he had not taken her round the pole as was customary. There was a *Sala* tree growing by the road side. Nanga Baiga caught the plait of his wife and she caught the tuft of hair on his scalp and thus they went round the tree seven times. Since then the *Sala* tree has become sacred to the Baiga tribe.

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 136.

When mother Earth and Nanga Baiga were going round the *Sala* tree they fell down violently in opposite directions resulting in their hair coming off. From the hair of Nanga Baiga appeared the spear grass and the hair of mother Earth turned into thatch grass. The Baigas till today put the spear grass in the thatch of their roof which symbolically to them represents the hair of Nanga Baiga for which reason their women are not allowed to climb the roof.

Sala tree figures in the *Ramayana* also.[1] Ramachandra and Lakshmana were in search of Sita who had been abducted by Ravana, the evil king of Lanka. In their wanderings they came across the vanquished and exiled King Sugreeva. He had been defeated and exiled from his kingdom by his brother Vali and lived in mortal fear of him. He hoped to defeat him one day and recover his throne and his wife. But Sugreeva saw no way of defeating Vali who was strong and brave like Indra and from whom he had received a divine necklace of great potency which made him invulnerable.

Sugreeva promised to place his entire army of *vanaras*, i.e., monkeys at the service of Rama to rescue Sita from the clutches of Ravana on the condition that Rama first help him regain his kingdom and his wife. Rama agreed to the condition but Sugreeva aware of Vali's strength was apprehensive whether Rama's strength would match that of his brother. One day he approached Ramachandra and cautiously mentioned Vali's strength. Lakshmana, who was also present at that moment, understood Sugreeva's doubts and suggested that Rama demonstrate his strength. Ramachandra bent his bow and pulling the string, shot an arrow at seven trees of *Sala* standing in a row. The arrow pierced the trees and returned to Rama's quiver. Seeing this miracle, Sugreeva was convinced that Rama was no ordinary mortal and would certainly defeat Vali. Since that time, *Sala* tree was associated with Vishnu as Ramachandra was his incarnation and it is held sacred by Hindus.

The tree in blossom is worshipped by those desiring offsprings. In Bengal certain tribes use the branches of the *Sala* tree for marriage ceremonies. It is a valuable timber tree, its wood is used for various purposes. It yields a resin used as an incense called *dhup*. Medicinally used as an astringent in diarrhoea and dysentery. Seeds are eaten after roasting and yield a fatty oil called *Sala* butter.

[1]H.P. Shastri, *Valmiki Ramayana*, vol. II, Kishkindhya Kanda, pp. 194-96; according to *Agni Purana* (vol. I, p. 41), trees shot at by Rama were *Tala* trees (Borassus flabellifer).

39

TAMARINDUS INDICA Linn.

FAMILY COMBRETACEAE

Sanskrit : Tintrini
Hindi : Imli, Amli
English : Tamarind

The name Tamarindus is derived from the Arabic word, *Tamar-Hind*, meaning Indian date.

According to a Birhor tribal story,[1] the reason for *Tintrini* leaves to be small is because Ramachandra, Lakshmana and Sita while on their exile of fourteen years came to a forest which grew *Tintrini* trees. The *Tintrini* those days had large, well developed leaves. Rama, his wife and brother made a hut under it. The large leaves of the tree sheltered them well. Rama said that they were supposed to suffer inconvenience during their exile but this tree was sheltering them from rain and sun, giving them protection from the intense heat and cold which were city comforts. He ordered Lakshmana to shoot at the leaves and split them. Lakshmana did as he was told and shot at the leaves with his bow and arrow and since then the leaves are finely divided.

The Dhanwar tribal story,[2] is almost similar except the reason for Lakshmana to shoot an arrow at them. During the rainy season, Sita was cooking food under a *Tintrini* tree but the rain kept on coming through the leaves and putting out the fire. Ramachandra was enraged at this and ordered Lakshmana to send a letter of protest to Indra, the god of rain, to stop the rain. Lakshmana tied the letter of protest to an arrow and shot it at the sky. The rain stopped but the arrow pierced through the broad leaves and split them into shreds and since that time they have remained small and divided.

According to an Oriya tribal tale,[3] Bimma had planted a Plantain tree which has large leaves. Ramma was jealous of him and planted a tree of *Tintrini* which those days had large leaves. Bimma did not like Ramma also planting a tree. He sent a parrot to shred the leaves of *Tintrini* into bits and its leaves have remained small since then.

Tintrini tree got famous in Hindu mythology because of Usha, the adopted daughter of Parvati. It is in her memory that no salt is taken

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 130.
[2]Ibid, p. 143.
[3]Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 145; idem, *Tribal Myths of India*, p. 143.

in the month of *Chet* and instead, food is seasoned with *Imli*, the pulp of the *Tintrini* fruit which is exceedingly sour. The story goes back to Ganesa getting an elephant head. One day Siva was coming after his bath when he saw his daughter Usha playing with Ganesa. He was in an angry mood and finding the two playing and ignoring him, his anger rose further and he cut off his son's head. Parvati lamented the death of her son and insisted that he be brought back to life. To appease her, Siva replaced the severed head by that of an elephant and thus revived the child. Usha had witnessed the scene and in fright, hid in a hillock of salt. When Parvati found her, she was annoyed at her for not looking after Ganesa who because of her negligence had to have an elephant head. She cursed Usha to be born on earth as the daughter of Banasura of Tezpur in Assam. Another legend makes her the daughter of Banasura, given in adoption to Parvati.

In either case, Usha protested that on earth she would die unrecognised and asked for forgiveness. But a curse once pronounced could not be revoked. Parvati relented and gave Usha a boon that in her memory no salt would be taken in the month of *Chet* but instead the juice of *Tintrini* fruit would be used to season the food, because Usha had hid in a hillock of salt, to escape the wrath of Siva. Usha was born on earth as the daughter of Banasura. She married Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna and went to live with him at Dwaraka.[1]

Tintrini tree came to be associated with Usha. *Chet* is a warm month in India and juice of the tamarind fruit is cooling. Usha's memory is commemorated by saltless meals in this month.[2] *Imli*, the fruit of *Tintrini* symbolises the wife of the Creator, Brahma. The fruit or the flowers of the tree are not used in any auspicious ceremony as it is extremely sour and the belief is that the ceremony at which it is offered, will become fruitless.

The fruit pulp is a refrigerant, carminative and laxative and an infusion of it is given in biliousness.

[1]Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, p. 17; Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, p. 446.
[2]The association of Usha with saltless meals in the month of *Chet* and the substitute of salt with *Tintrini* fruit was narrated to me by Mrs. Kamala Patel. It is a common folklore but could not be corroborated by any written text.

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TERMINALIA ARJUNA (Roxb.) Wight & Arn.

FAMILY COMBRETACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi : Arjuna

According to a story in the *Bhagavata Purana*,[1] Nala-Kubara and Mangriva, were the sons of *yaksha* king Kubera, the god of wealth. Once when intoxicated, they were playing stark naked with the *gandharva* girls in a river when Rishi Narada passed by. The boys were arrogant and they completely ignored him. Narada wanted to teach them a lesson and first thought that poverty was the only remedy for those who were arrogant. But since these boys were ignorant, insolent and intoxicated, he punished them by converting them into *Arjuna* trees, but did not make them lose their memory. And told them that after one hundred celestial years, the touch of Sri Krishna will save them. As a result, the sons of Kubera became a pair of *Arjuna* trees in Vraja near Mathura.

Once, as a punishment, child Krishna was fastened to a husking mill by his foster mother. Left alone, his attention was drawn to a pair of *Arjuna* trees growing nearby. He remembered the words of Narada and since he did not want him to be proven wrong, he approached the trees, dragging the husking mill behind him. Placing himself between the two trees, he pushed them and thus uprooted them. As the trees fell down with a crash, two fiery spirits came out, illumining space with their splendour. After praying to Krishna, they rose to heaven. The *gopis* were engaged in their household duties and the crash of the two lofty trees attracted their attention. The *gopas* who had witnessed the miracle, narrated this to the people of Vraja.

The wood of the tree is used for various purposes such as boat building, agricultural implements, tool handles, etc. Its bark is used for tanning, is styptic, tonic, febrifuge and antidysentric; pulverized bark gives relief in symptomatic hypertension, is used as diuretic in cirrhosis of liver.

[1]P.N. Sinha, *A Study of the Bhagavata Purana* or *Esoteric Hindustan*, p. 387

41

TERMINALIA BELLIRICA Roxb.

FAMILY COMBRETACEAE

Sanskrit & Hindi : Bahira, Vibhitika
English : Belliric myrobalam

According to a story in the *Mahabharata*,[1] Nala, the king of Nishadha and husband of Damayanti, was a gambler and adept at the game of dice. But once he lost everything, including his kingdom. Nala and Damayanti had to leave their home and live in a forest. Nala felt ashamed of himself and left Damayanti asleep in the forest and went away to seek his fortune in the world. After a lot of wandering, he took up service as a charioteer with an assumed name Vahuka, with the king of Vrihadaswa. Damayanti, on waking up and not finding Nala besides her, went back to her father, the king of Vidarbha.

Nala was known for his knowledge of horses and no one could excel him at handling them. As a charioteer of the king of Vrihadaswa, his fame spread and rumours about Vahuka's proficiency in handling horses reached Damayanti also. Not sure if Vahuka was really Nala, Damayanti hit on a plan to bring him to her father's kingdom. She announced that since Nala was dead, she will choose another husband at a *swayamvara* ceremony. King Rituparna of Vrihadaswa was also invited to the ceremony in the hope that his charioteer would accompany him. Damayanti's plan worked and Rituparna accompanied by Vahuka left for the *swayamvara* of Damayanti. On the way, they came across a *Vibhitika* tree laden with fruit. On seeing the tree, the king asked the charioteer to stop, "Behold my proficiency at calculation. Knowledge in its entirety is not found in anyone person. But I can tell you that the leaves and fruits of this tree that are lying on the ground exceed those that are on the tree by one hundred and one. The two branches of the tree have 50 million leaves and two thousand and ninety five fruits on it."

Vahuka addressed the king: "O king, you take credit in a matter that is beyond my perception. I will ascertain what you have said by the direct evidence of my senses by cutting down the tree and counting the number of leaves and fruits on it. Then it will no longer be a matter of speculation."

The king replied: "But there is no time." Nala assured Rituparana

[1]*Mahabharata*, vol. II, Vana Parva, sections LII-LXXX, Nalopakhyana Parva, pp. 154-56.

that he would reach in time to see the Sun rise but only after he had counted the leaves and fruits of *Vibhitika.* The king was desirous of reaching the *swayamvara* on time and reluctantly told Vahuka to count the leaves and fruit of the tree. Vahuka speedily dismounted from the chariot, cut down the tree and started counting the leaves and fruit on it. He was amazed to find the the calculation of the king was right. The king then told Nala that he was also proficient at dice. Hearing that, Vahuka begged the king. "You give me the knowledge of how to throw the dice and take away my knowledge of equestrian science." The king agreed to this arrangement and imparted the knowledge of dice to Nala. When Nala became acquainted with the science of how to throw the dice, Kali came out of his body, vomiting from his mouth the poison of Kartotaka. When Kali afflicted by Damayanti's curse came out of Nala's body, fire of that curse also left Kali's body. Nala was going to curse Kali as she was the cause of his losing at dice but she implored his forgiveness and thus entreated, Nala controlled his temper and forgave her. Kali in fear of Nala entered the *Vibhitika* tree and the tree fell into disrepute.[1]

Charms and incantations made while reciting a particular evil *mantra,* written with a quill made of crow's feather, using a composition of collyrium, gum of the *Neem* tree, poison, marrow and blood of a human victim, and hung from a *Vibhitika* tree, are considered most efficacious in destroying one's enemies.

Vibhitika fruits are used as dice but the shape of the fruit nuts prevents any side from being properly on top.

The wood of the tree is used for various purposes such as packing cases, carts, rafters, etc., ripe fruits are astringent, used as a purgative; oil applied to rheumatic swellings, bark diuretic, demulcent and purgative.

[1]Dutt, *Agni Purana*, vol. II, p. 1175.

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TERMINALIA ALATA Heyne ex Roth.
syn. Terminalia Tomentosa Wight & Arn.

FAMILY COMBRETACEAE

Hindi	:	Saja, Saj
Oriya	:	Sahaji

The following story is recounted as told by Verrier Elwin.[1] Gonds of India worship the tree because they consider it as the traditional home of Bara deo. The reason why the *Saja* tree has no juice in its fruit and bears marks of five fingers, goes back to a story involving two friends, a blind man and a hunchback. The hunchback planted a tree of *Saja* and the blind man planted a *Mahua* tree. The *Saja* tree grew to be a crooked-shaped tree like the hunchback and the buds of the *Mahua* tree would not open.

One day the two friends went on a journey. Since the blind man could not see, he was led by his friend, the hunchback. The hunchback after a while got tired of his companion and decided to get rid of him. With the intention of killing him, he cooked a snake for the midday meal and gave it to the blind man to eat. The blind man smelled the flesh of a snake and would not eat it. The flesh of the snake emitted medicinal vapours which going into the nostrils of the blind man suddenly opened his eyes. Seeing that his friend had cooked a snake for him, he was annoyed and taking his stick, beat up his hunchback friend so hard that it made his crooked body straight. When the two friends- went home, they found that the trunk of the *Saja* tree had become straight and the buds of the *Mahua* tree had opened.

When the *Saja* tree bore fruit, it was sweet and juicy. The hunchback sucked the fruit and squeezed it so hard, it became dry and left the mark of his five fingers on it for eternity. Since then the fruit contains no juice and has five long lines on it.

Korava tribe believe that Terminalia catappa, another species is a lucky tree because Ramachandra made a hut beneath it when he was in exile for fourteen years and was accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana.[2]

[1]Elwin, *Myth of Middle India*, p. 141.
[2]Ibid., p. 129.

43

TYPHA ELEPHANTINA Roxb. non Grah.
syn. Typha angudtifolia Watt. non Linn.

FAMILY TYPHACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Eraka
Hindi	:	Mothitrina
Marathi	:	Eraka
English	:	Elephant grass, Reed

At the holy place Pindaruka in Gujarat, *rishis* Kanva, Viswamitra and Narada were engaged in meditation.[1] Some young boys of the Yadava race decided to play a prank on the sages. They dressed Samba, the son of Jambavati and Krishna, as a young pregnant girl and asked the *rishis*: "What child this female, the wife of Babhru, who is anxious to have a son, give birth to?" The sages by their divine wisdom knew the trick played on them and were angry at the disrespect shown to them. They answered: "This person will bring forth a club that will destroy the entire Yadava race." The boys were alarmed at this and related the episode to Vasudeva. After seven days a piece of iron was passed by Samba. Vasudeva was afraid of the curse of the *rishis* and got the iron piece ground to powder and thrown into the sea. The particles of iron turned into reeds called *Eraka*.[2] A piece of the iron which was sharp like the blade of a sword could not be powdered and this was also thrown into the sea. It was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught by a hunter called Jara. He extracted the iron piece from the body of the fish and fixed it to the tip of an arrow.[3]

As the time for the destruction of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas neared, terrible portents of the impending calamity appeared. Strong winds blew; streets swarmed with rats and mice; pots and pans cracked for no apparent reason; Sarikas chirped without a break; goats imitated the cries of jackals; asses were born to kine and elephants to mules. Cats were born to bitches, and mouse of the mongoose. Brahmans, *pitris* and the deities were ignored by the Vrishnis. Fires when ignited, cast their flame towards the left; innumerable worms appeared in food.

[1]Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, p. 476; Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, p. 276; *Mahabharata*, vol. XI, Mausala Parva, p. 257.

[2]According to one interpretation, the powdered iron stuck to the blades of the reed and turned them into weapons.

[3]In the *Mahabharata*, there is no mention of the piece of iron that could not be powdered.

Constellations were stuck by planets. Death personified as a dark woman, haunted every home. The Vrishnis mixed wine with food cooked for Brahmans and gave it to the monkeys and afterwards started drinking and dancing. But soon the festivities ended in rivalry, and dance and music gave place to insults. As people drank more, destructive flames of dissension were kindled amongst them. They fell upon each other with deadly weapons. Soon the weapons were exhausted. Vrishnis then broke the reeds growing on the seashore and started hitting each other with them. The reeds, *Eraka* grass were like thunderbolts in their hands, and they inflicted fatal blows on each other. Even Krishna used the reeds as weapons, and the reeds became like a club of iron and with that he killed anyone who came near him. Finally, not a single Yadava was left alive, except Krishna and his charioteer, Daruka. Seeing death all around him, Krishna instructed Daruka to go to Arjuna and inform him of the terrible slaughter that had taken place and to ask him to take the women and other survivors like old and infirm under his protection as Dwaraka was going to be engulfed by the ocean. Then Krishna looked for Balarama and saw him sitting under a tree and witnessed the soul of Balarama issuing out of his body in the form of a snake.[1] The snake proceeded towards the ocean. In fact the ocean out of respect came to receive him and thus the soul of Balarama entered the waters of the deep ocean.

After the passing away of Balarama, Krishna knew that the end had come. He was sitting under a tree of *Aswattha* with one leg resting on his knee and in deep thought. Jara, a hunter in search of a kill saw only the heel of Kesava's foot and mistaking it to be a deer, shot an arrow at it. The arrow was tipped with the piece of iron that could not be powdered and has been swallowed by a fish. Jara had caught the fish and had extracted the piece of iron. Krishna was cursed to be killed only through his feet as Rishi Durvasas had made the rest of his body invulnerable. After the passing away of Krishna, the ocean engulfed the city of Dwaraka. The Yadavas, Andhakas and the Vrishnis had all been killed by the blades of the *Eraka* grass.

With slight variations, the same story appears in the Buddhist *Jatakas*.[2] Sage Kanhadipayana was blessed with divine vision. The sons of Vasudeva approached him to test whether this was true. They made a young boy dress like a pregnant girl and asked Kanhadipayana when the girl would deliver. The ascetic perceived through his miraculous vision, the hoax that was played on him and feeling insulted, answered: "This man on the seventh day from today will bring forth an Acacia wood and with

[1]The names Baladeva and Balarama are interchanged in the text but both denote the same person.

[2]*Jataka Stories*, book IV, Ghata Jataka, pp. 55-57.

that will be destroyed the descendants of Vasudeva, even if the wood is burnt and thrown into a river." The boys called the ascetic false as a man cannot give birth to a child, and killed him. When the king heard of it, he was frightened lest the prophecy came true and put a guard on the young man. When on the seventh day, he brought out a piece of Acacia wood from his belly, it was burnt and the ashes thrown into the river. The ashes floated down the river and ultimately stuck to one side of the postern gate and from that grew an *Eraka* plant.

One day the king decided to sport in the river, and went therewith his friends. After they had all drunk wine, singing and dancing started and under the influence of drink, it soon led to quarrels. When the quarrels became serious, men pulled out the reeds from the river and in their hands they turned into clubs made of the Acacia wood with which they killed each other and the only survivors were, Vasudeva, his brother Baladeva and sister Anjana and the priest. The four fled in a chariot to a forest called Kalamattika where lived a demon called Muttika. Seeing Baladeva, he assumed the form of a wrestler and challenged Baladeva to a fight. Vasudeva tried to prevent him from accepting the challenge but in vain. The demon caught Baladeva, and swallowed him. Vasudeva then went away with his sister and the priest and travelling all night, came on the outskirts of a village. Sending Anjana and the priest to procure food, Vasudeva lay down in the shelter of a bush. A hunter called Jara saw the bush shake and presuming that there was a pig under it, threw his spear at it which pierced the foot of Vasudeva. Vasudeva overcome with plain realised that his end had come. After giving instructions to those left, Krishna's soul departed. Thus except Anjana, all the Vasudeva's perished.

44

VIGNA MUNGO (Linn.) Hepper
syn. Phaseolus radiatus Roxb., non Linn.
Family Papilionaceae, Fabaceae

Sanskrit	:	Masha
Hindi	:	Urad
English	:	Black gram

Once a prince offered a sacrifice to the gods so that he could obtain a son. Something went amiss with the sacrifice and instead of a son, a

beautiful maiden arose from the dying embers of the sacrificial fire. Brahma, who was the presiding deity of the ceremony, named her Sitala,[1] the cooling one. Sitala asked Brahma about the powers she would have. Brahma assured her that she would always be worshipped by the mortals provided she carried seeds of *Urad* with her because it would be the power of the *Urad*, lentils that would be responsible for her worship. Sitala asked for a companion and was directed to Siva. Sitala visited the celestial spheres where Siva was in eternal meditation. Eulogised by her, Siva agreed to give her a companion. From the drops of sweat due to Siva's asceticism, was born a demon. The demon was of an enormous size and was cut into three pieces by Siva, but Brahma put him back into one piece. Now the demon had three pairs of arms and legs. He was named Jvarasura which literally means the fever-demon. He was assigned by Siva to Sitala as a companion.

Sitala required a beast of burden to carry her heavy bag of lentils and her companion Jvarasura suggested an ass for the purpose. Sitala disguised as an old woman, Jvarasura as a young boy and with their bag of lentils on the back of an ass, they visited all the celestials. The lentils got converted into pox germs and whosoever they visited was afflicted with fever and smallpox. Thus afflicted, the celestials begged for mercy and promised Sitala that they would worship her on the condition that she goes to earth with her bag of lentils.

Sitala agreed and descended to earth. To find out how powerful she was, she first visited King Birat who was an ardent devotee of Siva. Birat accepted her as a goddess but refused to give her precedence over Siva. Sitala threatened him with her powers of inflicting smallpox but inspite of her threats, he refused to give in to her. To humble him, Sitala called seventy-five different types of pox and each one of them boasted of the fever, eruptions and misery that she could inflict on those who refused to worship Sitala. But even then King Birat did not allow his people to worship her, as a result of which epidemics spread and death was the outcome. Those who finally acknowledged her supremacy, including King Birat, were miraculously restored back to health without any blemish left on them.

Sitala is described as a beautiful woman dressed in yellow clothes, which is the colour of spring. Since she visits people in the spring season, she is called Basanta. She is named after the spring season festival, Basant or Vasant. She is accompanied by a young woman called Raktavati who has special powers over the illness called measles.

Sitala carries a winnowing fan above her head and holds a silver broom in one hand and a golden water pot in the other. Sitala's broom

[1]O.P. Bang, 'Concept of smallpox goddess in parts of Bengal', *Men in India*, quarterly, Jan–March, 1973.

sweeps away those who do not worship her. The pox germs are kept in her water pot and sifted by her winnowing fan. She hates dirt and, therefore, while she is visiting a home, which means that someone is afflicted with smallpox in that house, the house has to be cleaned and sprinkled with the waters of river Ganga to purify it. Ganga is a personified wife of Siva.

Neem or banana leaves are freshly laid on the floor of the sick room particularly under the bed of the sick person. Incense and camphor are burnt twice a day to disinfect the house. *Neem* leaves are strung on the doorway to announce Sitala's presence in the house. She is one of seven sisters, and by her presence is meant that someone is afflicted by smallpox. Incedence of smallpox is never mentioned derogatively lest the victim is struck dead by her but referred as *mai daya* or mother's kindness, or as *mai khela*, i.e., mother's play.

The seed of *Urad* is believed to be the reputed origin of the Indian weight measure known as *masa*. Twelve *masas* make a *tola*, 480 make a pound.

Even though *Urad*, lentil is cultivated widely in the upper Gangetic plain, it is eaten mainly in Punjab and Haryana. Most orthodox people in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal either will not eat it or else will cook it at the time of a death in the family, perhaps because of its association with the dreaded smallpox. It has a high protein content, and economically very important; used in various kinds of food; a source of phosphorus, given in rheumatism, nervous and hipatic diseases as well as in dropsy; root is narcotic and used for aching bones.

45

ZIZYPHUS MAURITIANA Lam.
syn. Zizyphus jujaba Lam, non Mill.

F. RHAMNACEAE

Sanskrit	:	Vadari, Badari, Vadara Kuvala, Madhuraphala
Hindi	:	Ber
English	:	Indian Jujube, Common Jujube

This tree is mentioned at more than one place in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.[1] According to the *Ramayana*, the tree is hard because of

[1]Elwin, *Myths of Middle India*, p. 129.

the following incident. While Ramachandra and Lakshmana were searching for Sita who had been abducted by Ravana (see Shorea robusta), they came across a *Vadari* tree and asked him if he had seen Sita anywhere. The trees those days could see, hear and talk like human beings. The tree answered that he had in fact tried to save her by holding on to her clothes and pointed to a cloth entangled in its branches and said that it was a part of her dress, and gave the direction in which she had been forced to go with Ravana. Rama blessed the tree for having tried to save Sita and gave it a boon that no matter how badly it was cut, it will not die and even if a single root of it was left, it will spring up again, putting forth fresh leaves and branches. And that is the reason for the tree's hardiness and ability to grow in arid zones.

A popular story from *Ramacharitamanasa* mentions an episode from the life of Ramachandra. While Ramachandra was looking for Sita, he came aross a poor Bhilni, belonging to the untouchable caste and a devotee of Rama. She offered him the fruit of *Vadari* but first tasted each fruit to find if the fruit was ripe. Ramachandra accepted the fruit which had been first tasted by the Bhilni saying that if anything was offered to him with a purity of heart and genuine feelings, it was as clean and pure as if untouched. Since that time, the fruit of *Vadari* has come to be held sacred and included in many religious ceremonies.

Rishi Bharadwaja saw the lotus eyed *apsara* Ghritachi and seeing her youth and beauty, his vital seed fell.[1] Bharadwaja gathered his semen in a cup made of leaves. From his seed was born a girl of unrivalled beauty. Her father named her Sruravati and left her in the hermitage and went away to Himavat. Sruravati on growing up led the life of a celibate, practicing severe austerities to win Indra as her husband. Indra visited her in the form of Rishi Vasishtha. Beholding the greatest of the ascetics, Sruravati addressed him: "O adorable one, tell me your command. O you of excellent vows, I will serve you according to my might. But I will not give you my hand in marriage because of my regard for Sakra. I am gratifying Sakra, the lord of the three worlds with vows and rigid of austerities." The illustrious god answered: "Your penance and austerities are known to me. They are the root of great happiness. Those who cast off their bodies after having practised penance, obtain the status of gods. Now, O blessed damsel, boil these five *Vadari* fruits." To test Sruravati's devotion to him, he deliberately obstructed the boiling of *Vadari* fruits. Sruravati started boiling the *Vadari* fruits given to her by Indra in the guise of Rishi Vasishtha. Time passed, the day started waning, the fuel got exhausted but the fruits were still not boiled. Seeing the fire about to die, Sruravati began to burn her own limbs to provide fuel for

[1]*Mahabharata*, vol. VI, Salya Parva, p. 416; Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 136.

boiling the *Vadari.* When her feet got totally burnt by the fire, Indra the lord of the three worlds was gratified at her sacrifice and assuming his own true form, appeared before her and blessed her saying that from now on she will live with him in heaven and her hermitage will become the most popular place of pilgrimage, known for removing sins. It will become known in the three worlds by the name Vadarapachana.

Vadarapachana is also renowned for its qualities of removing sin because of its association with Siva Mahadeva. In the *tirtha,* Vadarapachana lived the *saptarshis,* along with Arundhati, wife of one of the *rishis.* Leaving Arundhati in the hermitage, the seven *rishis* went to the Himalayas to gather fruits and roots for their sustenance. While the *rishis* were still there, a severe twelve-year drought occurred. The *rishis* having already built a place to stay in, decided to settle there till the drought was over. Meanwhile Arundhati left alone, devoted herself to ascetic penances. Pleased at her devotions, Siva assuming the form of a Brahman, visited her and asked for alms. Arundhati told him that the store of food had been exhausted and asked him if he would eat the *Vadari* fruits. Siva agreed and she started cooking the *Vadari* fruit and at the same time listening to a sacred discourse from Siva and the twelve-years of drought passed away as if it was a single day and Arundhati did not realise that she had not eaten all that while. At the end of the twelve-years drought, the seven *rishis* returned from the mountains after having gathered the fruits. Siva Mahadeva then appeared before them in his true form and praised Arundhati for her penance, cooking for twelve-years and fasting all the time. He granted her the boon of *tirtha* Vadarapachana, becoming the favourite *tirtha* of *siddhas* and *devarshis.*

Vadari fruits are offered mainly to Siva. Even though the fruits are also associated with Indra, he is seldom worshipped separately but invoked at most sacrifices.[1]

The holy river Ganga arises from below a big *Vadari* tree growing on Mt. Kailasa.[2]

Vadari or *Badari* is also sacred to Vishnu, and Vishnu is called Badrinath, the Lord of *Badari,* the Jujube tree.[3] The town called Badrinath, a place of pilgrimage at approx. 3137 metres above the sea derives its name from a tree of *Badari* that once grew there. There is a sulphur spring nearby and probably an ancient tree cult associated with it still exists.

[1]Ibid., p. 417.

[2]Hopkins, *Epic Mythology,* p. 7, (it must be a mythical tree as *Vadari* trees do not grow at that height).

[3]Penzer, *The Ocean of Story,* vol. I, p. 159.

[4]Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index,* vol. I, p. 177.

According to the *Atharvaveda* and the *Kausikasutra,*[4] *Kudi,* identified as the twig of *Vadari,* was tied to the body of the dead to efface their traces, presumably in order to prevent the return of the spirit to its old home.

Though the Sikhs do not believe in the sacredness of trees, there is one tree of jujube growing in the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar, which is known as the 'Tree which removes sorrow'. This particular tree of *Vadari* is held sacred by the Sikhs.

Appendix

List of Plants Mentioned

Popular names	*Latin names*	*Family*
Agaru, Agar	Aquilaria agallocha Roxb.	Thymelaeceae
Amalaka, Aonla	Emblica officinalis Gaertn.	Euphorbiaceae
Amarphala	Monstera deliciosa Liebm.	Araceae
Amra, Aam, Mango	Mangifera Indica Linn.	Anacardiaceae
Aparajit	Clitoria ternata Linn.	Fabaceae
Aparmarga	Achyranthes aspera Linn.	Amaranthaceae
Arishta	Sapindus mukorossi Gaertn.	Sapindaceae
Arjuna tree	Terminalia arjuna Roxb.	Combretaceae
Arka, Ak	Calotropis gigantea Linn.	Asclepiadaceae
Asoka	Saraca asoca (Roxb.) De Wilde.	Caesalpiniaceae
Aswattha	Ficus religiosa Linn.	Moraceae
Atimukta	Hiptage benghalensis Kurz.	Malpighiaceae
Bahula	Amomum subulatum Roxb.	Zingiberaceae
Bakula	Mimusops elengi Linn.	Sapotaceae
Baobab	Adansonia digitata Linn.	Bombacaceae
Bara-nala	Arundo donax Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Barna	Crataeva nurvala Buch-Ham	Capparidaceae
Belati-sij	Pedilanthus tithymaloides Port.	Euphorbiaceae
Ber	Zizyphus mauritiana Lam.	Rhamnaceae
Bhadra	Gmelina asiatica Linn.	Verbenaceae
Bhandira	Calerodendrum infortunatum Linn.	Verbenaceae
Bhela	Semicarpus anacardium Linn.	Anacardiaceae
Bilva, Vilva	Aegle marmelos Correa. ex. Koen.	Rutaceae
Champaka	Michelia champaca Linn.	Magnoliaceae
Chandana	Santalum album Linn.	Santalaceae
Choti elachi	Elettaria cardamomum maton	Zingiberaceae
Chuta	Mangifera indica Linn.	Anacardiaceae
Dadima	Punica granatum Linn.	Punicaceae
Devadaru	Cedrus deodara (Roxb.) Loud.	Pinaceae

Popular names	*Latin names*	*Family*
Dhanya	Oryza sativa Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Dharbha ghas	Imperata cylindrica Beauv.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Dhatri	Emblica officinalis Gaertn.	Euphorbiaceae
Dhatura	Datura stramonium Linn.	Solanaceae
Dhup	Jurinea macrocephala Benth.	Compositeae; Asteraceae
Dodheri (santhal)	Cheiranthus Cheiri Linn.	Cruciferae; Brassicaceae
Durva	Cynodon dactylon pers.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Eraka grass	Typha elephantina Roxb. non Grah.	Typhaceae
Gaduchi, Galuchi	Tinospora cordifolia (Willd.) Miers ex Hook.f. & Thoms.	Menispermicaceae
Grahadruma	Terminalia catappa Linn.	Combretaceae
Guggulu	Commiphora mukul (Hook ex stocks)	Burseraceae
Guma	Leucas lavandulaefolia Rees.	Labiateae; Lamiaceae
Haridra, Haldi	Curcuma domestica Valeton	Zingiberaceae
Harmal	Peganum harmala Linn.	Zygophyllaceae
Ikshu, Khanda	Sacchraum officinarum Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Ingudi	Balanites aegyptiaca Linn.	Simaroubaceae; Balanitaceae
Ingudi	Sarcostigma kleinii Wight & An.	Icacinaceae
Jaiphala	Myristica fragrans Houtt.	Myristicaceae
Jamvu, Jamun	Syzygium cumini Linn.	Myrtaceae
Jand	Prosopis cineraria Wall.	Mimosaceae
Japa, Shindhuka	Hibiscus rosa-sinensis Linn.	Malvaceae
Jayanti	Hordeum vulgare Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Jivaka	Putranjiva roxburghii Wall.	Euphorbiaceae
Kacvi, Kachalu	Colocasia antiquorum Schott	Araceae
Kadali, Plantain	Musa Paradisiaca Linn.	Musaceae
Kadamba	Anthocephalus cadamba Miq.	Rubiaceae
Kakkola	Mangifera indica Linn.	Anacardiaceae
Kalasaka	Corchorus capsularis Linn.	Tiliaceae
Kalonji	Nigella sativa Linn.	Ranunculaceae
Kamunda	Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn.	Nymphaeaceae
Kanchana	Bauhinia tomentosa Linn.	Caesalpiniaceae
Karanjaka	Pongamia pinnata Pierre	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Karaunda	Carissa spinarum Linn.	Apocynaceae
Karavira	Nerium indicum Mill.	Apocynaceae
Karnikara	Pterospermum acerifolium Willd.	Sterculiaceae

Popular names	Latin names	Family
Kasmari	Gmelina arborea Roxb.	Verbenaceae
Kesara	Eclipta alba Linn.	Compositeae; Asteraceae
Kesava	Mimusops elengi Linn.	Sapotaceae
Ketaki	Pandanus odoratissimum Linn.f.	Pandanaceae
Khadira	Areca catechu Willd.	Mimosaceae
Kher	Heteropogon contortus Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Kimsuka	Butea monosperma Lam.	Papilionaceae
Kodrava, Kodo, Millet	Paspalidium scrobiculatum Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Krishna's cup	Ficus beghalensis var. Krishnii Linn.	Moraceae
Kubjakama	Trapa natans var. bispinosa Roxb.	Trapaceae
Kunda	Jasminium multiflorum Burm.f.	Oleaceae
Kundara	Boswellia serrata Roxb.	Burseraceae
Kurkara	Cucurbita pepo Linn.	Cucurbitaceae
Kusa	Cenchorus ciliaris Linn. *Or*	Gramineae; Poaceae
Kusa	Desmostachya bipinnata Stapf.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Kusht	Costus speciosus (Koenig) Sm.	Zingiberaceae
Kushta, Kuth, Costus	Saussurea lappa C.B. Clarke	Compositeae; Asteraceae
Madhuka	Glycyrrhiza glabra Linn.	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Madhuka	Cynomitra ramiflora Linn.	Fabaceae
Madhuka	Madhuca indica F. Gmel	Sapotaceae
Madhavi	Hiptage benghalensis Kurz.	Malpighiaceae
Mallika, Juhi	Jasminium auriculatum Vahl.	Oleaceae
Manasasij	Euphorbia neriifolia Linn.	Euphorbiaceae
Mandara	Erythrina variegata Linn.	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Mango, Amra	Mangifera indica Linn.	Anacardiaceae
Masha, Urd	Vigna mungo (Linn.) Hepper	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Munja ghas	Imperata arundinaceae Cyr.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Nalaka, cane sticks	Arundo donex Linn.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Narikel, Coconut	Cocos nucifera Linn.	Palmae; Arecaceae
Nimba, Neem	Azadirachta indica A. Juss	Meliaceae
Nirgundi	Vitex negundo Linn.	Verbenaceae
Nyagrodha, Banyan	Ficus benghalensis Linn.	Moraceae

Popular names	Latin names	Family
Parijata	Nyctanthes arbor-tristis Linn.	Oleaceae
Patali, Patala	Stereospermum suaveolens D.C.	Bignoniaceae
Phalgu	Bauhinia tomentosa Linn.	Caesalpiniaceae
Pilu, Pilva	Salvadora oleoides Decne	Salvadoraceae
Pindara, Bhiliaura	Trewia nudiflora Linn.	Euphorbiaceae
Plaksha	Ficus arnothiana Miq.	Moraceae
Plaksha	Ficus lucescens Blume	Moraceae
Plaksha	Ficus talboti King	Moraceae
Plaksha	Butea monosperma Kuntze	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Prasni-parni	Uraria picta Desv.	Fabaceae
Prasni-parni	Uraria lagopodioides Desv.	Fabaceae
Priyangu	Setaria italica (Linn.) Beauv.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Pundarika	Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn.	Nymphaeaceae
Putiki (Telugu)	Daphniphyllum neilgherrense Rosenth.	Euphorbiaceae
Putiki	Grewia rothii DC	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Putilika	Trichosanthes dioic Roxb.	Cucurbitaceae
Rakta-Kanchana	Bauhinia purpurea Linn.	Caesalpiniaceae
Rudraksha	Elaeocarpus sphaericus (Gaertn.) K. Schum.	Elaeocarpaceae
Sabai ghas	Ischaemum augustifolium Hack.	Gramineae; Poaceae
Saja, Sij	Terminalia alata Heyne ex Roth.	Combretaceae
Sal, Shal, Sala	Shorea robusta Gaertn.f.	Dipterocarpaceae
Salmali	Bombax ceiba Linn.	Bombacaceae
Sami, Shami	Prosopis cineraria Druce	Mimosaceae
Sarala	Pinus roxburghii Sarg.	Pinaceae
Savanjna, Sobhanjana	Moringa oleifera Lam.	Moringaceae
Sehund, Manasasij	Euphorbia neriifolia Linn.	Euphorbiaceae
Shaktotaka	Strebulus asper Lour.	Moraceae
Shetoot	Morus alba Linn.	Moraceae
Sivari, Nirgundi, Sindhuvaraka	Vitex negundo Linn.	Verbenaceae
Snuhi	Euphorbia neriifolia Linn.	Euphorbiaceae
Soma, Somalata	Sarcostemma acidum Voigt.	Asclepiadaceae
Sringara, Singhara	Trapa natans Linn. var. bispinosa (Roxb.) Makino.	Trapaceae
Sudarsanaballi	Tinospora sinensis Lour.	Menispermaceae

Popular names	Latin names	Family
Supari, areca nut	Areca catechu Linn.	Palmae; Arecaceae
Syandana, Sinsapa	Dalbergia sissoo Roxb.	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Tagara	Ervatamia divaricata Linn.	Apocynaceae
Tala tree, toddy palm	Borassuss flabellifer Linn.	Palmae; Arecaceae
Tambaku, Tobacco	Nicotiana tabaccum Linn.	Solanaceae
Tila, Sesame	Sesamum indicum Linn.	Pedialiaceae
Tilaka, Lodhra	Symplocos racemosa Roxb.	Symplocaceae
Tinduka	Diospyros peregrina (Gaertn.) Gurke	Ebenaceae
Tinsa	Ougeinia oojeinensis Roxb.	Papilionaceae; Fabaceae
Tintrini, tamarind	Tamarindus indica Linn.	Caesalpiniaceae
Tridhara	Euphorbia antiquorum Linn.	Euphorbiaceae
Tulasi, holy basil	Ocimum sanctum Linn.	Labiateae; Lamiaceae
Udumvara, Udumbara	Ficus glomerata Roxb.	Moraceae
Urumbasa, Urum (Malayalam)	Urena lobata Linn.	Malvaceae
Vadari, Badari	Zizyphus mauritiana Lam.	Rhamnaceae
Varuna	Crataeva nurvala Buch-Ham	Capparidaceae
Vata	Ficus benghalensis Linn.	Moraceae
Vibhitika	Terminalia bellirica Roxb.	Combretaceae

Appendix 2

Glossary of Mythological and Historical Names and Religious Sects

Adiratha	A charioteer who brought up Karna as a son.
Aditi	Mother of Adityas.
Aditya	A name of Surya, son of Aditi.
Agastya	A *rishi*, reputed author of some *Rigveda* hymns.
Aghasura	An *asura*.
Agni	God of Fire.
Ananda	A disciple of Buddha.
Ananta	A celestial serpent called infinite, forms a couch of his coils for Vishnu to rest; also a name of Vishnu.
Anasuya	Wife of Rishi Atri.
Andhaka	A son of Kasyapa and Diti, always kept his eyes closed. Believed to be blind.
Andhaka-Vrishnis	Two bothers of the Yadava race, ancestors of the Andhaka-Vrishnis clan.
Aniruddha	Grandson of Krishna, married Usha, the daughter of Banasura.
Anjana	Sister of Krishna.
Apsara	Nymphs of Indra's heaven, arose from the Ocean of Milk.
Arjuna	The third Pandu brother.
Arundhati	Wife of Rishi Vasishtha, a model of conjugal excellence.
Asuras	Demons.
Avalokitesvara	A Buddha in the making.
Balabhadra	An aspect of Balarama.
Baladeva	Elder brother of Krishna, a part incarnation of Vishnu.
Balarama	Elder brother of Krishna, same as Baladeva and Balabhadra.
Banasura	An *asura*, lived in Assam, father of Usha, devotee of Siva.
Barhishmati	Daughter of Viswakarma.
Bhadrakali	A goddess identified with Durga.
Bhadresvara	A name of Siva.

Bhagawan	The Supreme Being.
Bhanumati	Wife of Bhartrihari.
Bharadwaja	A *rishi.*
Bhartrihari	A pious, ancient king.
Bhaskari	The god of death.
Bhimasena	Second of the Pandu brothers.
Bhishma	Son of Santanu, and Ganga.
Bhrigu	A Vedic sage.
Bodhisattva	A Buddha in the making.
Brahma	The Creator
Brahmacharya	One who has taken the vow of celibacy.
Brahman	Belonging to the first of the four castes of Hindus.
Brahmani	A goddess, wife of Brahma.
Brihaspati	A *rishi,* same as Vrihaspati.
Buddha	Siddhartha Gautama, progenitor of Buddhism.
Budha	Planet mars, son of Tara and Soma.
Chamunda	Durga.
Chandika	Goddess Durga.
Charanas	The panegyrists of the gods, eight deities attendant on Indra, personification of natural phenomena.
Chyavana	A *rishi,* married Sukanya.
Dadhichi	A Vedic sage from whose bones deadly weapons were made.
Daityas	Evil beings, children of Diti and Kasyapa.
Daksha	Father of Sati, father-in-law of Siva.
Damayanti	Wife of Nala.
Danavas	Demons, originated from Danu and a daughter of Daksha.
Daruka	Charioteer of Krishna.
Devadutta	A cousin and rival of the Buddha.
Devarshis	Saints of the celestial order.
Devatas	Semi-divine beings.
Devi	The Goddess, wife of Siva.
Dhanwantri	The physician of gods.
Dharani	Earth personified as a goddess.
Dhatri	Mother earth.
Dhenuka	An *asura,* took the form of an ass, killed by Balarama.
Diti	Wife of Kasyapa and mother of *daityas.*
Draupadi	Common wife of the five Pandava brothers.
Durga	A goddess, wife of Siva.
Durvasas	A *rishi,* son of Atri and Anasuya, had an irascible temper and many fell under his curse.
Dushyanta	A king, married Sakuntala but forgot her due to a curse.

Ganas	Beings of all types, followers of Siva.
Gandharvas	Celestial beings, live in Indra's heaven, musicians, prepared the *Soma rasa,* have a partiality for women.
Ganesha, Ganapati	Elephant-headed god, remover of all obstacles, son of Siva and Parvati.
Garuda	Half man, half eagle mount of Vishnu.
Gauri	Parvati, the fair one.
Gayatri	Wife of Brahma, also a hymn.
Ghritachi	An *apsara.*
Gopalesvara	Krishna.
Gopas and Gopis	Cowherds, companions of Krishna.
Govinda	Krishna as a cowherd.
Hanuman	The monkey-faced god, devotee of Ramachandra.
Hari	Vishnu
Indra	God of the firmament.
Indrani	Wife of Indra.
Ira	Goddess of plants.
Jaimini	A *rishi.*
Jalandhara	An *asura,* husband of Vrinda.
Jambavati	Wife of Krishna, mother of Samba.
Jara	A hunter who killed Krishna by mistake.
Jvarasura	Fever demon.
Kadru	Wife of Kasyapa, mother of serpents.
Kaitabha	An *asura* killed by Vishnu.
Kali	A goddess, wife of Siva.
Kalika	Durga.
Kaliya	A poisonous cobra subdued by Krishna.
Kamadeva, Kama	The Hindu god of love.
Kanakamuni	A *rishi.*
Kandarpa	Kamadeva.
Kanva	A *rishi,* brought up Sakuntala.
Karna	A half brother of the Pandavas, adopted by Adiratha
Kartotaka	A highly poisonous serpent.
Karttikeya	Skanda.
Karttiki	Female energy of Karttikeya.
Kasyapa	Husband of Diti, father of *danavas.*
Katyayani	A name of Durga.
Kesava	A name of Krishna.
Krakuchchanda	A *rishi.*
Krishna	Eighth incarnation of Vishnu, son of Devaki and Vasudeva.
Kshatriyas	Second of the four castes of Hindus, the warrior class.
Kubera, Kuvera	God of wealth.
Kusa	Son of Sita and Ramachandra, twin brother of Lava.

Lakshmana	Younger brother of Ramachandra.
Lakshmi	Wife of Vishnu, goddess of prosperity, beauty, fertility.
Lalita	Aspect of Parvati as a young playful girl.
Lava	Son of Ramachandra and Sita, twin brother of Kusa.
Lohityayani	Nurse of Skanda.
Lokapalas	Guardians of different corners of the earth, e.g., Kubera is the guardian deity of the north.
Madana	Kamadeva, Hindu god of love.
Madhava	Vishnu.
Madhavi	Lakshmi.
Madhu	A demon killed by Vishnu.
Mahadeva	Siva.
Mahavira	Jaina Tirthankara.
Mahendra	Indra.
Makara	Fish or crocodile.
Manakanaka	*Rishi*, son of Vayu and Sukanya.
Manasa	The snake goddess.
Manes	Departed souls.
Mangriva	Son of Kubera.
Manibhadra	A *yaksha*.
Mantarishvan	An aerial being.
Manu	Lawgiver.
Mara	A name of the God of death.
Marisha	Daughter of Rishi Kandu and an *apsara*.
Markandeya	A *rishi*, born of Sukanya and the god of Wind.
Maruts	Storm gods.
Mohini	Vishnu as a young, beautiful, enticing woman.
Muchalinda	Serpent king.
Muni	A *rishi*.
Muttika	A goblin.
Nagas	Snakes, children of Kasyapa and Kadru.
Nahusha	A king who defeated Indra and took his throne.
Nairita	An imp or a goblin.
Nala	King of Nishada, husband of Damyanti.
Nala-Kubara	Son of Kubera.
Nanda	Foster father of Krishna.
Nanda Devi	Durga, the patron deity of the Nanda mountains.
Nanga Baiga	Mythological tribal chief of the Baiga tribe.
Narada	One of the seven *rishis*.
Narayana	Vishnu.
Narsi-Vishnu	Vishnu in his half-man, half-lion form.
Nateswara	Siva as the cosmic dancer.
Nrihari	Vishnu.
Padma	The lotus goddess.

Padmapani	Avalokitesvara.
Parvati	Wife of Siva.
Pavana	God of Wind.
Pitris	Ancestral souls.
Prachetasa	Ten brothers, married Marisha and Daksha was their son.
Pradyumna	Son of Krishna and Rukmini; manifestation of Kamadeva, God of Love.
Prajapati	A progenitor or Creator.
Pralamba	An *asura* killed by Baladeva.
Priyavrata	A son of Brahma, the Creator.
Pururavas	A mortal king, married *apsara* Urvasi.
Radha	Krishna's favourites mistress.
Rakshasas	Evil beings.
Raktavati	*Devi* responsible for inflicting measles.
Ramma, Rama, Ramachandra	Ramachandra of *Ramayana* fame, an incarnation of Vishnu.
Ravana	An evil king of Lanka, abducted Sita.
Ribbhu	A son of Brahma, an epithet used for Indra, Agni and Adityas.
Rishi	An inspired poet or sage.
Rudra	A Vedic God, later identified with Siva.
Rudresvara	A name of Siva.
Rukmini	Chief queen of Krishna, incarnation of Lakshmi.
Sabari	An untouchable woman, devotee of Ramachandra.
Sachi	Is Indrani, wife of Indra.
Sakra	Indra.
Sakuntala	Daughter of Rishi Viswamitra and an *apsara*; brought up by Rishi Kanva; married Dushyanta.
Samba	Son of Krishna and Jambavati.
Sambhu	Siva.
Santha chuda	An *asura*.
Saraswati	Wife of Brahma, sometimes considered a wife of Vishnu; goddess of learning, music and arts.
Satyabhama	The favourite wife of Krishna.
Satyavrata	Trisanku.
Savitri	Wife of Satyavan.
Senaka	Mahanama Sakka, nephew of the Bodhisattva.
Seshanaga	The remainder, a celestial serpent.
Siddhartha	Gautama Buddha who started Buddhism.
Siddhas	88,000 semi-divine beings, dwell in the sky.
Sikhi	A *rishi*.
Sita	Wife of Ramachandra.
Sitala	Smallpox goddess.

Siva	God of destruction.
Sivalinga	The symbol of Siva.
Skand	God of war.
Soma	The moon, lord of streams.
Sri-Lakshmi	Wife of Vishnu, goddess of beauty, prosperity, fertility.
Sruravati	Daughter of Rishi Bharadwaja.
Sudras	Fourth caste of Hindus, the servile class.
Sugreeva	Brother of Vali, friend of Ramachandra.
Sujata	A maiden who offered Buddha a dish of rice and milk.
Sukanya	Daughter of King Saryati; wife of Rishi Chyavana.
Sukra	Son of Bhrigu, priest of *daityas*.
Surabhi	A wish-fulfilling celestial cow.
Suradhipa	Lord of celestials.
Surpanakha	Sister of Ravana.
Surya, Suryadeva	The Sun-god.
Swadha	Wife of Brahma.
Tara, Taraka	Wife of Vrihaspati, mother of Budha.
Taraka	A *daitya*.
Tathagata	Buddha.
Trimurti	The triad: Brahma, Vishnu, Siva.
Tulasi	Vrinda, married Jalandhara, incarnation of Lakshmi.
Twashtri	A deity, a divine artist, craftsman, bestower of long life and prosperity.
Ugrasena	A king of Mathura, father of Kansa and Devaki.
Uma	Consort of Siva, also known as Parvati.
Upasruti	A goddess conferring boons.
Urvasi	*Apsara,* married Pururavas, a mortal king.
Ushanas	Preceptor of *daityas* and *asuras,* also called Sukra, father of Devayani.
Vahuka	Nala's assumed name as a charioteer.
Vaishnava	Follower of Vishnu
Vaisravana	Lord of waters.
Vaisya	Third of the Hindu castes, merchants by profession.
Valakhilyas	Dimunitive, thumb-sized *rishis.*
Valamiki	A *rishi,* wrote the *Ramayana.*
Vali (Bali)	A monkey-chief, brother of Sugreeva.
Vanadevata	Tree spirit.
Vanaspati	Lord of vegetation.
Varuna	A Vedic deity associated with water, Lord of water.
Varuni	Wife of Varuna, identified as the goddess of wine.
Vasava	Vrihaspati, a deity or priest, intercedes with gods on behalf of men.
Vasishtha	A *rishi.*
Vasudeva	Father of Krishna, husband of Devaki.

Vasuki	A celestial serpent.
Vasus	Eight deities attendant on Indra, personifications of natural phenomena.
Vidura	Half-brother of Kauravas and Pandavas.
Vidyadharas	Possessors of knowledge, a class of inferior deities, generally of a benevolent nature.
Vinata	Wife of Kasyapa and mother of Garuda.
Vinayaka	Ganesa.
Vipaswi	A *rishi.*
Viresvara	Siva.
Virochana	A *daitya* king.
Vishnu	One of the Adityas, Preserver of the universe.
Visvakarma	Chief architect of the universe.
Viswamitra	A *rishi.*
Viswarupa	An epithet of Vishnu.
Viswas	Semi-divine beings of an inferior order.
Viveswara	A Vedic god worshipped at the end of the *Soma* sacrifice.
Vrikshika, Vanadevi	A forest maiden or a female tree spirit.
Vrinda	Tulasi, wife of Jalandhara.
Vritra	An *asura,* a demon of drought, enemy of Indra.
Vyoman	*Asura.*
Yadava	Belonging to the Yadava race.
Yakshas	Supernatural beings, attendants of Kubera, god of wealth.
Yama	God of death.
Yogesvara	Siva as a *yogi.*
Yudhishthira	Eldest of the five Pandu brothers.

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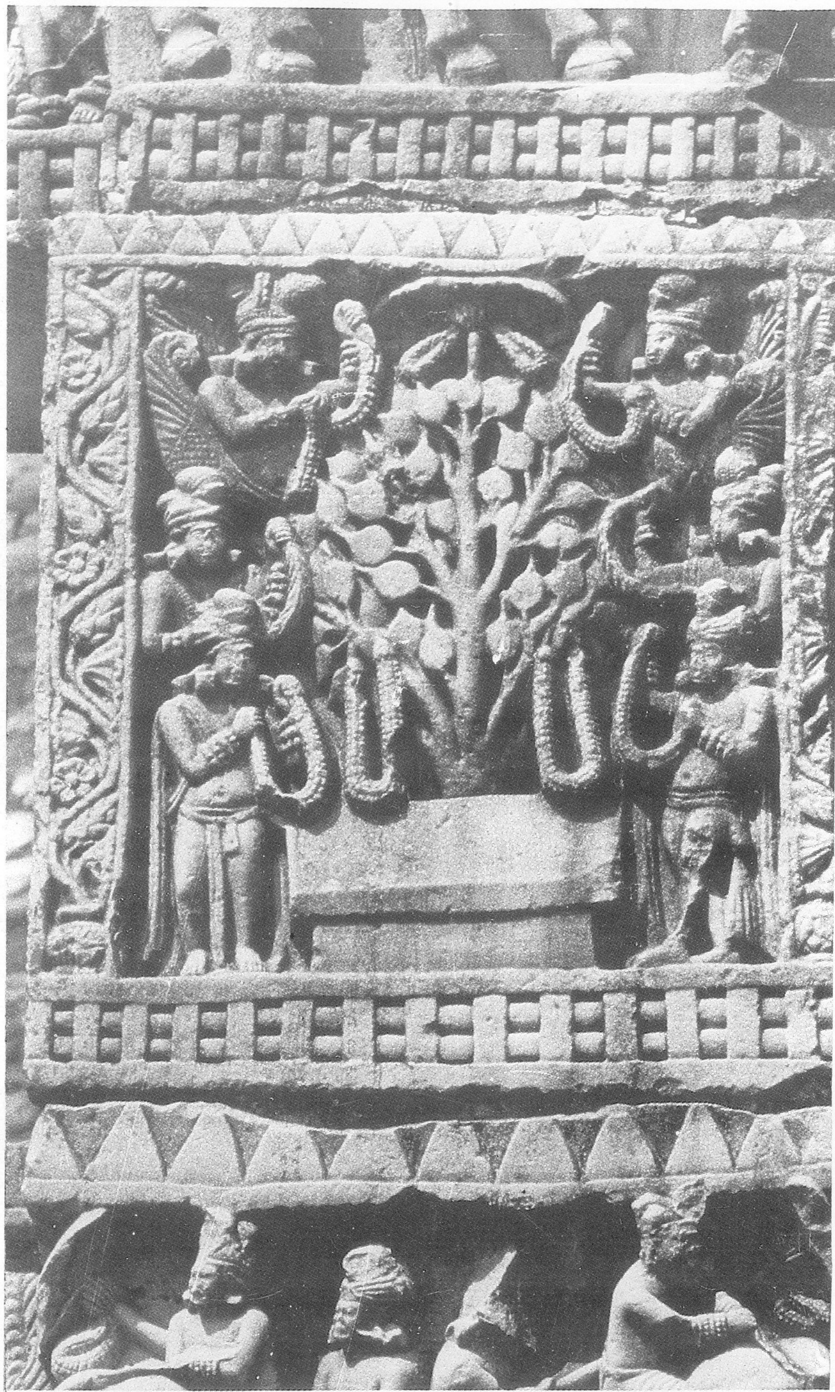
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Plates



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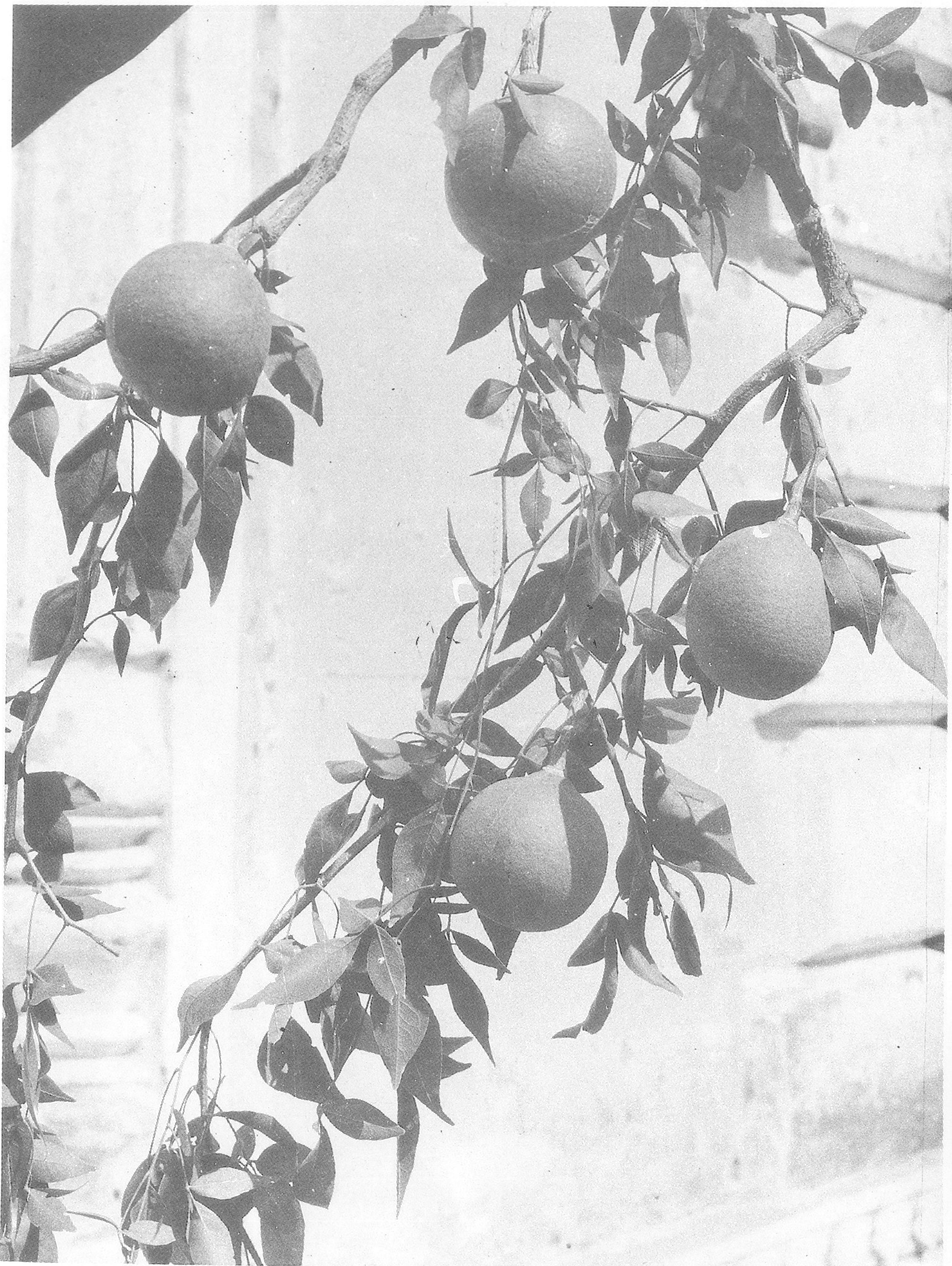
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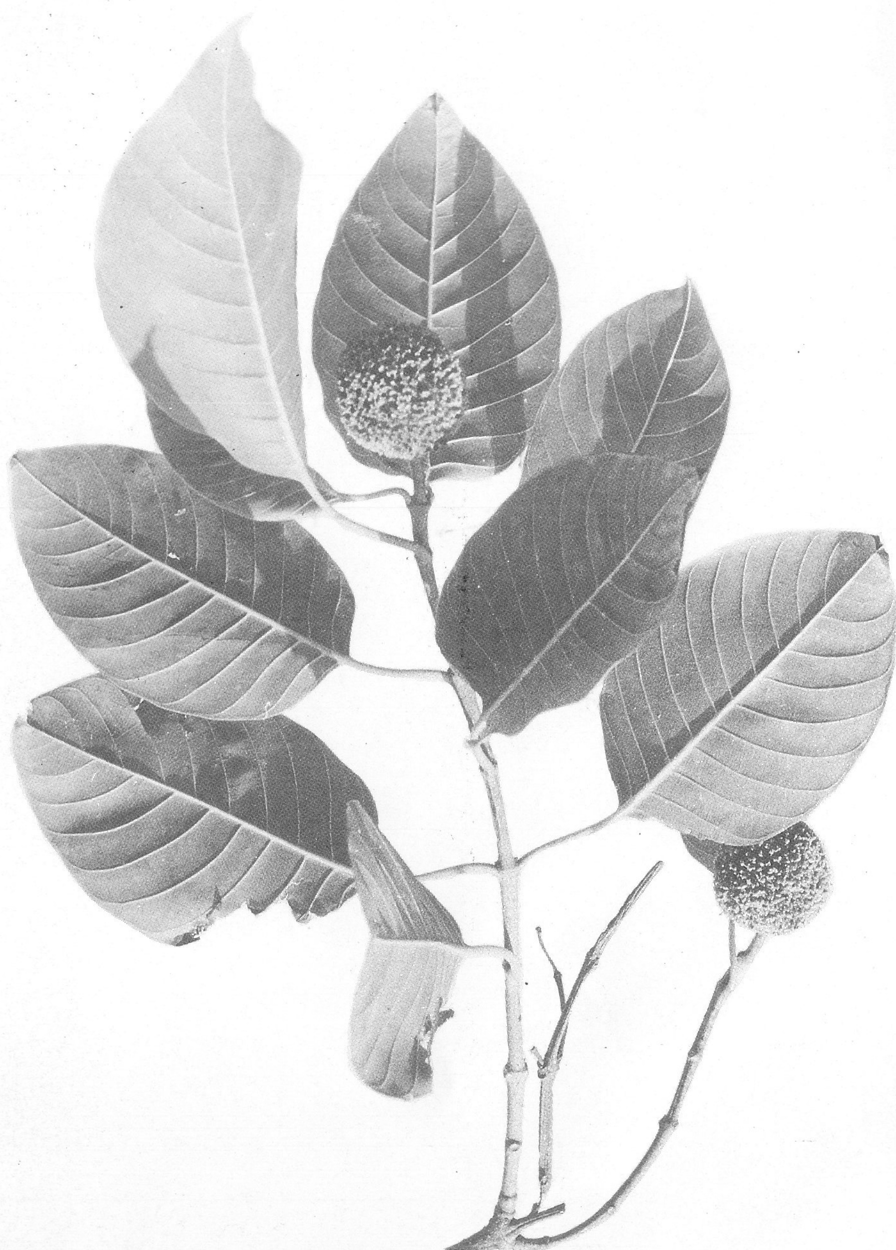
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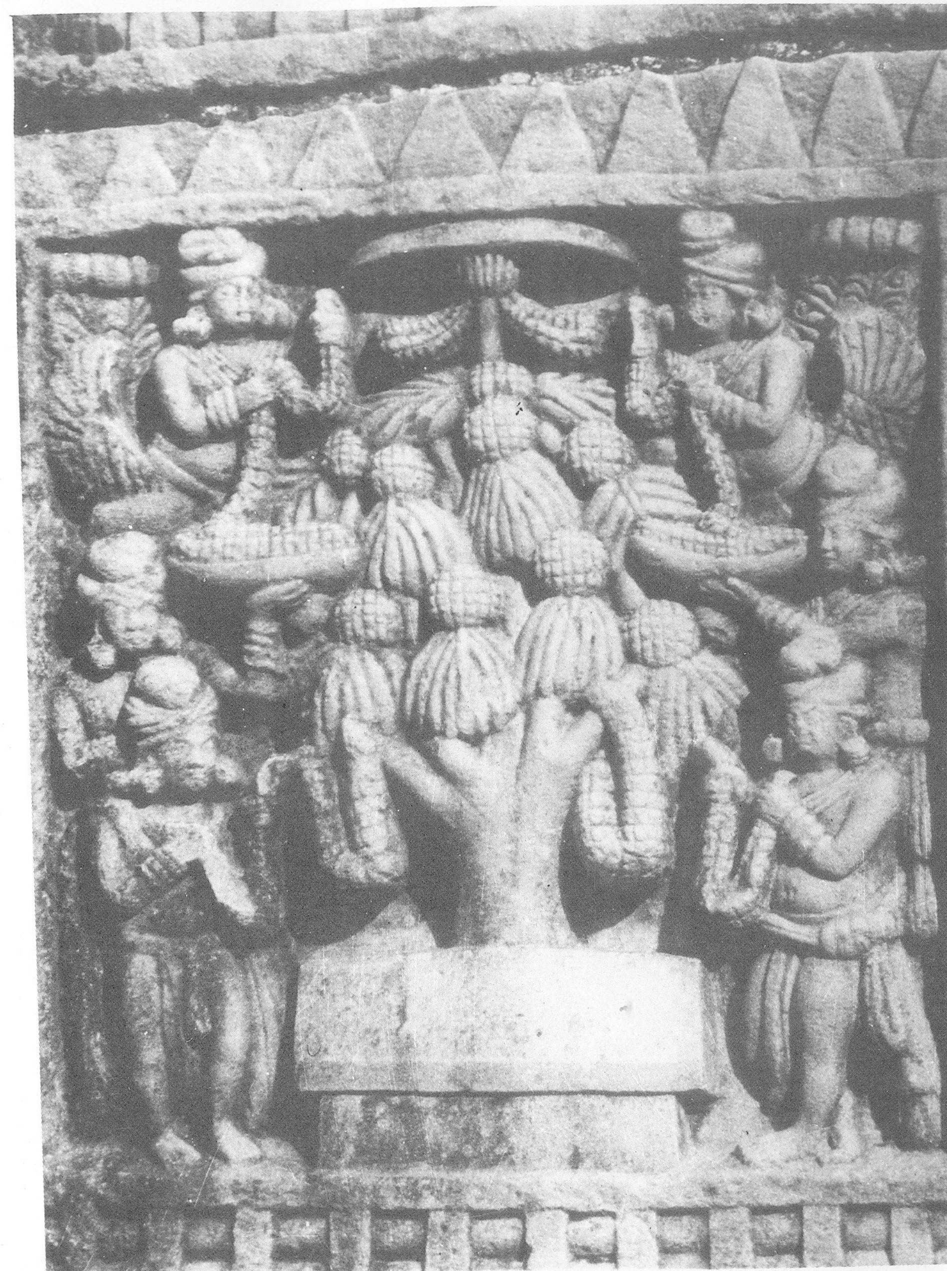
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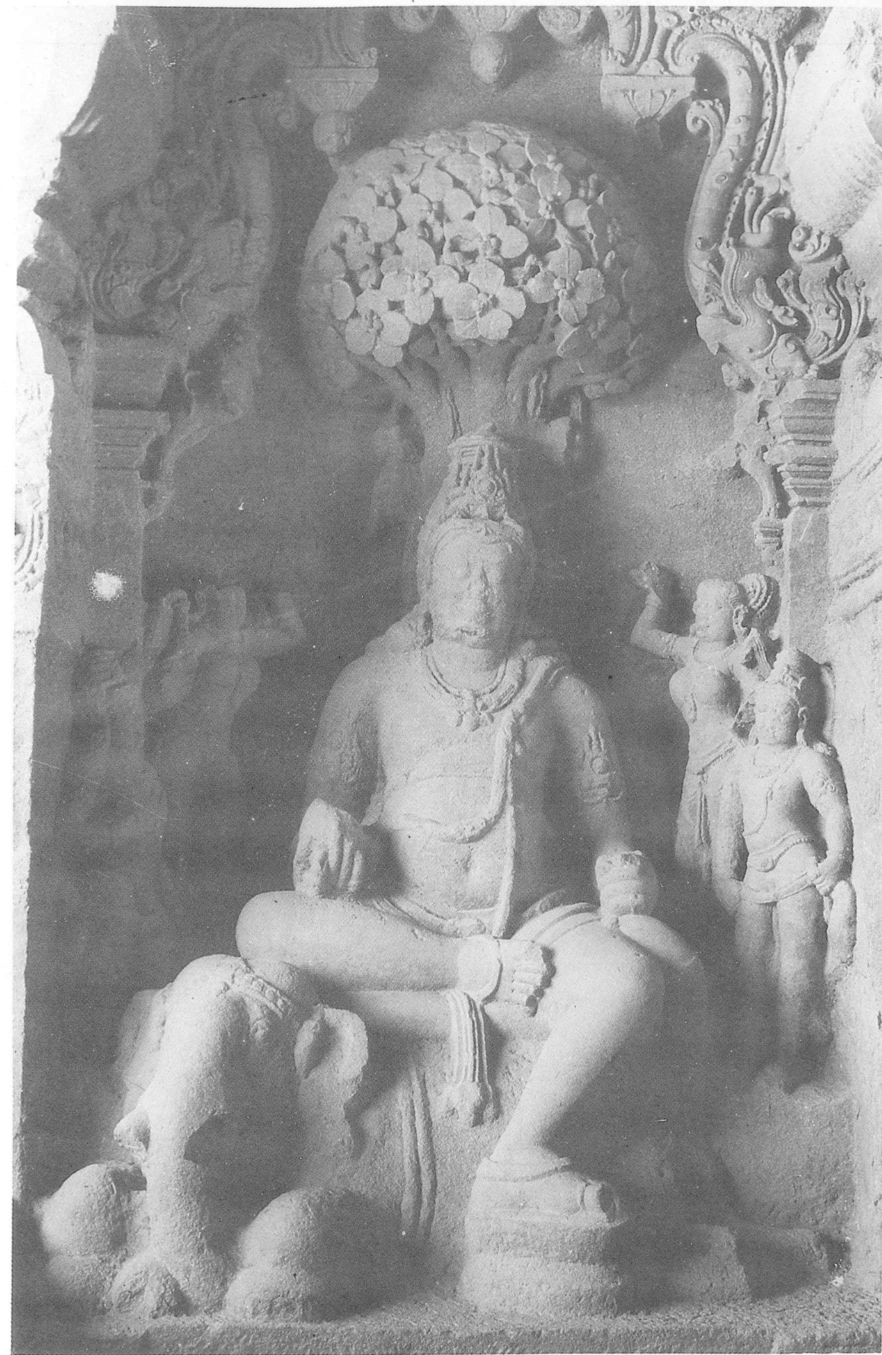
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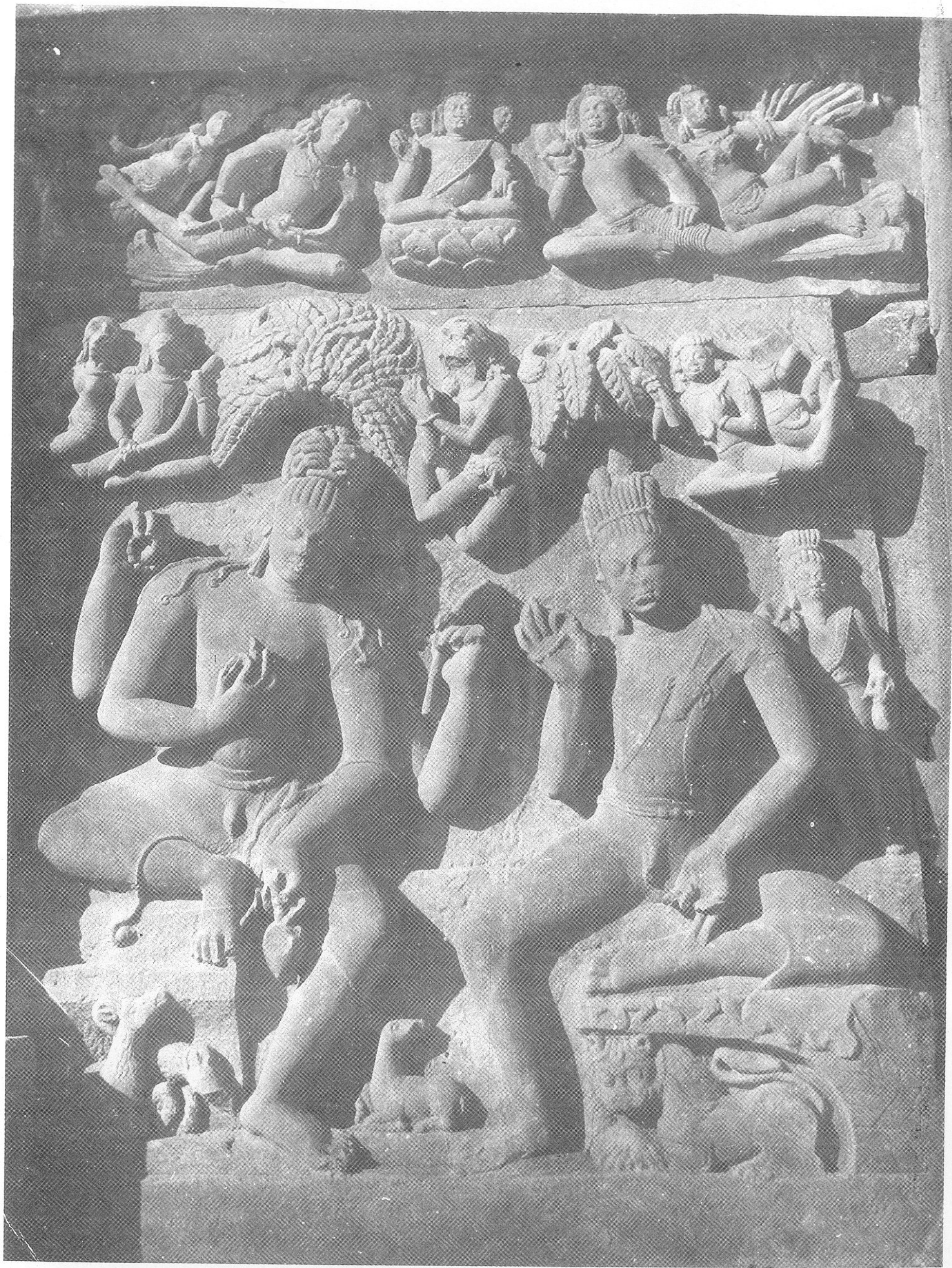
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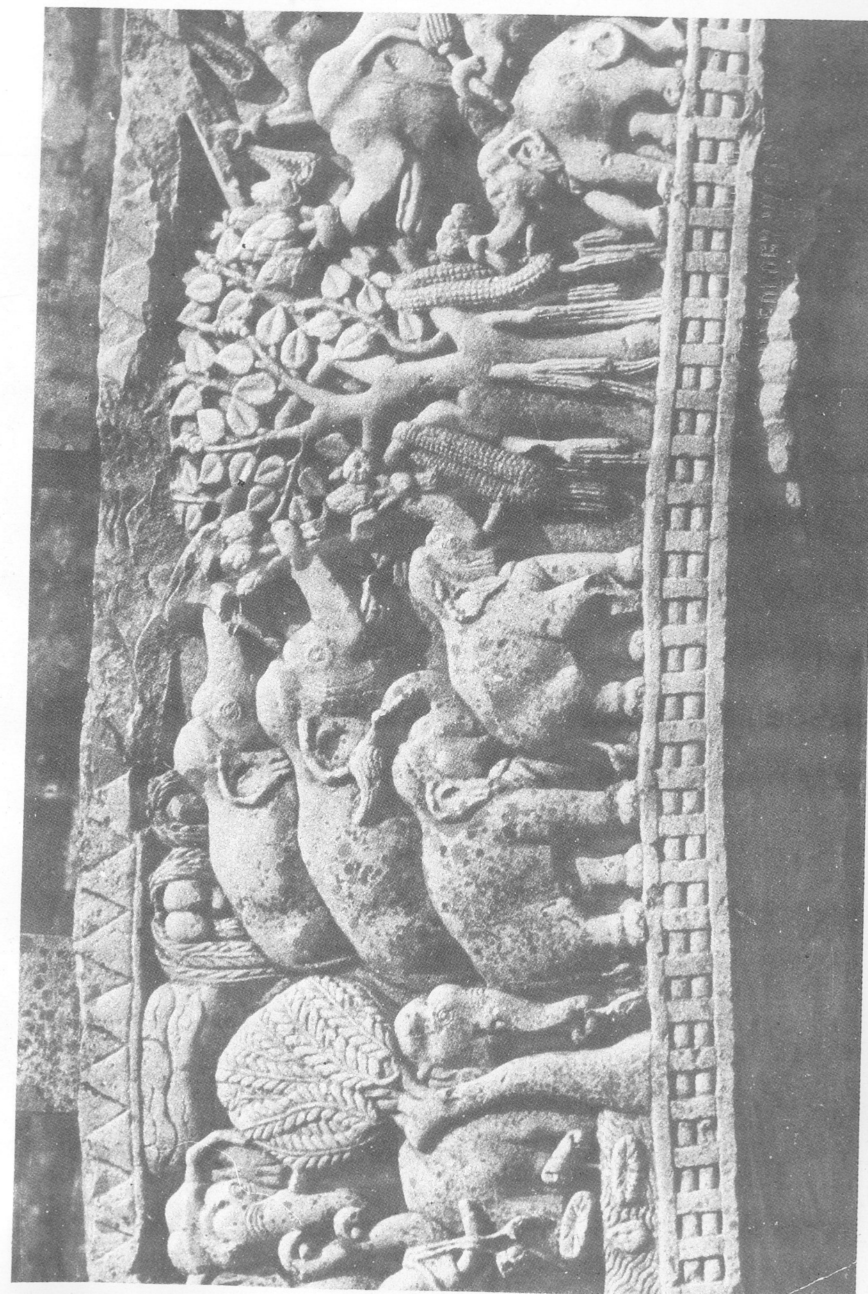
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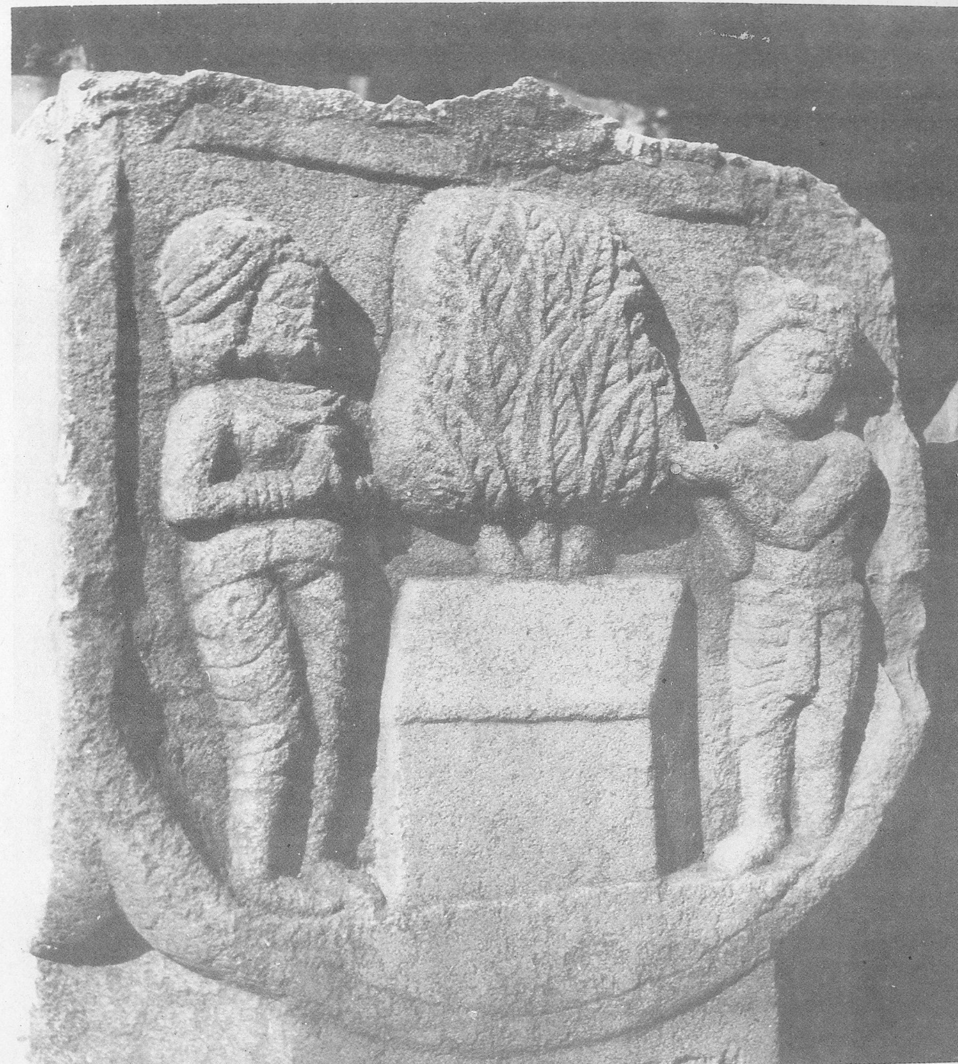
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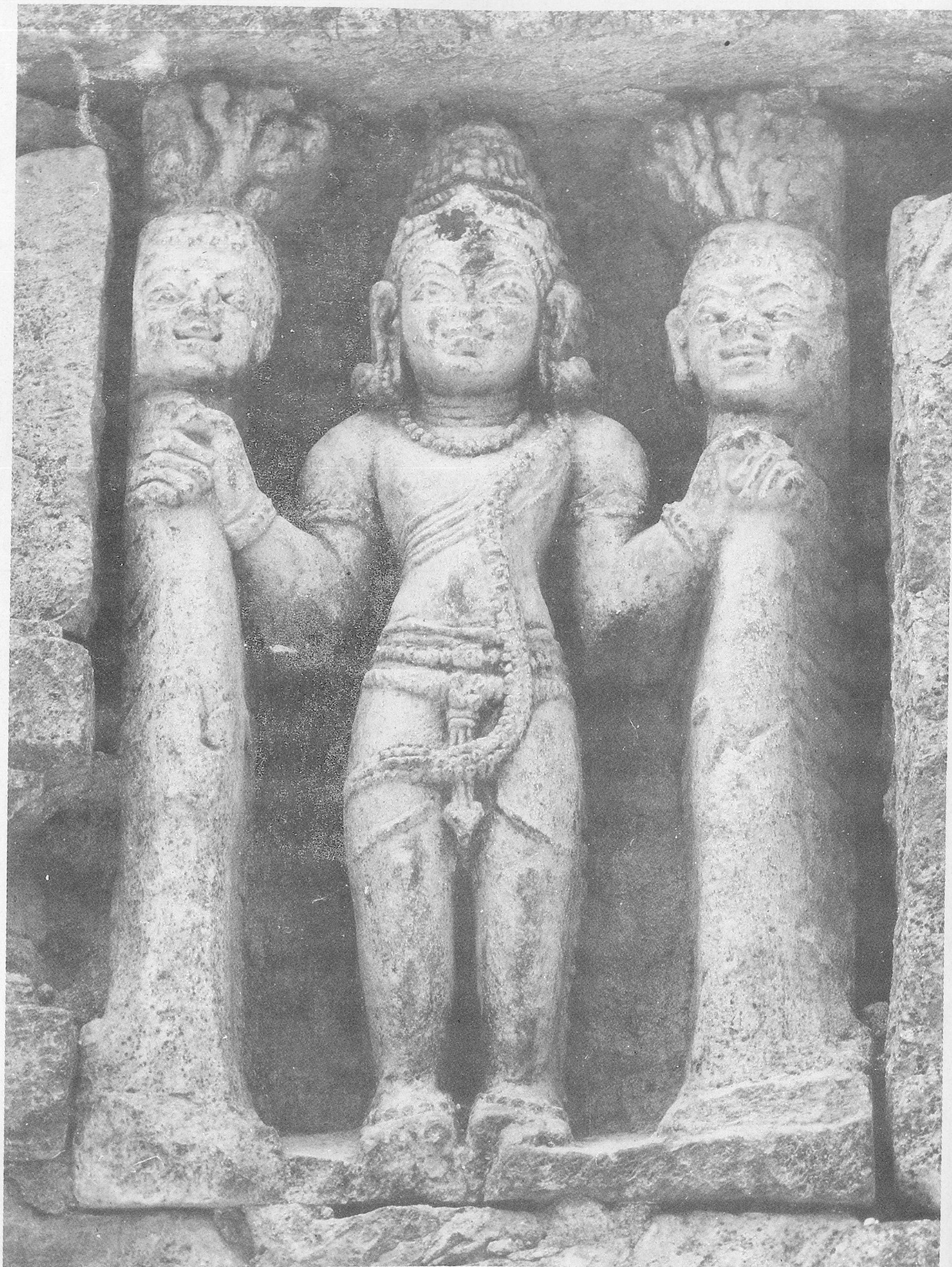
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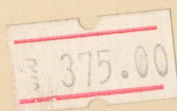
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